

Series: *Colossians: The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ*

Lesson: *Reconciliation: A Complete Reversal*

Text: Colossians 1:20–23 (L4)

Date: Sunday, January 29, 2012

Colonial Hills
Baptist Church

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

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TEACHING TIP

• From Leah Elms: “Before I went over each teaching point, I told them what my application question was going to be. I told them I knew I was expecting them to digest a lot of information in a little amount of time, and so to help give them a ‘filter’ or a point of reference, I was going to let them know what we would be discussing. I didn't want them to feel caught off guard or put on the spot when it came time to share. I thought it really helped. Of course, other ideas were also talked about, but I think it helped on two levels—one, they knew I expected them to be participating, not just listening; and two, it prepped those that need to feel more prepared before talking.”

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Colossians 1:24-29 – *Everyone a Gospel-Servant*

INTRODUCTION

John MacArthur provides us with a simple paragraph review of soteriology in his commentary on Colossians 1:20-23. He summarizes the doctrine of salvation by stating that there are “five key words used in the New Testament to describe the richness of salvation in Christ...In *justification*, the sinner stands before God as the accused, guilty and condemned, but is declared righteous (Rom. 8:33). In *redemption*, the sinner stands before God as a slave, but is granted his freedom by a ransom (Rom. 6:18–22). In *forgiveness*, the sinner stands before God as a debtor, but the debt is paid and forgotten (Eph. 1:7). In *reconciliation*, the sinner stands before God as an enemy, but becomes His friend (2 Cor. 5:18–20). In *adoption*, the sinner stands before God as a stranger, but is made a son (Eph. 1:5).¹

As we continue in our study of Colossians, we remember from last week that Paul has magnificently demonstrated Christ's supremacy in 1:15-19. In the following four verses (1:20-23), and in keeping with his overarching goal of this epistle, Paul stabilizes the Colossian believers while refuting the heretics and shows Christ's sufficiency. He does this by discussing that fourth description of salvation—the concept of reconciliation.

¹ MacArthur, John. *Colossians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996. P. 48-55. And, MacArthur, John. “Reconciled to God,” a sermon on Colossians 1:20-23 preached on April 22, 1976.

The Greek word for reconciliation (*katallasso*) simply means “to change or exchange,” and its New Testament usage applies that idea to relationships (cf. I Corinthians 7:11; Romans 5:10; II Corinthians 5:18-20), describing “the exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship.”² The word for reconciliation in Colossians 1 is *apokatallasso*. You can see that this is a compound word with a Greek preposition affixed to the front. This prefix serves to intensify the meaning, as we saw with the Greek word for “knowledge.”³ Thus, Paul is stressing that Jesus is able to completely, fully, totally reconcile this universe to Himself. Paul probably used this word to counter the false teachers in Colossae who had rejected Jesus’ deity and thus His saving ability. Paul triumphantly proclaims that Jesus, who is the supreme God and cosmic Christ (vv. 15-19) and who possesses the fullness of God (v. 19), will fully, totally, and completely reconcile all things to God (vv. 20-23). Our study of reconciliation will be organized around four considerations.

THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION (vv. 20-21)

In these verses, Paul addresses two aspects of reconciliation.

1. *General reconciliation (v. 20)*

According to verse 20, “all things” are reconciled to God through Christ.⁴ This refers to a general (or universal, physical) reconciliation, in which all things will be brought back into their proper position of subordination to Jesus. According to Genesis 3 and Romans 8, the entire universe has been terribly affected by sin and subsequently marred in its relationship to its Creator. Much of it—humanity and the fallen heavenly hosts—outright

² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. P. 521. [BDAG]

³ The Greek *gnosis* is the basic word for knowledge, while *epignosis* (used throughout Colossians 1) signifies a deep, full, relational knowledge.

⁴ “Paul again takes direct aim at the false philosophical dualism of the Colossian heretics. They taught that all matter was evil and spirit was good. In their scheme, God did not create the physical universe, and He certainly would not wish to be reconciled to it. Paul declares that God will indeed reconcile the material world to Himself, and further, that He will do it through His Son, Jesus Christ. Far from being a spirit emanation unconcerned with evil matter, Jesus is the agent through which God will accomplish the reconciliation of the universe. The German theologian Erich Sauer comments, ‘The offering on Golgotha extends its influence into universal history. The salvation of mankind is only one part of the world-embracing counsels of God... The “heavenly things” also will be cleansed through Christ’s sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:23). A “cleansing” of the heavenly places is required if on no other ground than that they have been the dwelling of fallen spirits (Eph. 6:12; 2:2), and because Satan, their chief, has for ages had access to the highest regions of the heavenly world... the other side becomes this side; eternity transfigures time and this earth, the chief scene of the redemption, becomes the Residence of the universal kingdom of God” (Eric Sauer, *The Triumph of the Crucified*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960. Pp. 179, 180. Quoted in MacArthur, *Colossians*, pp. 56-58.).⁴

rebelled. In Christ Jesus, God has already guaranteed a reversal of the curse, a restoration of righteousness and order, and a return to Eden (cf. Genesis 1-2 with Revelation 21-22). This will become physically obvious during the Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 11:6-9; 24:23; 30:26; 60:19-20; 65:25). Finally, the creation will be “delivered from the bondage of corruption” (Romans 8:21), and God will create a new heaven and a new earth (II Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). In this way, then, “all things” truly will be reconciled in their right position to God with creation being recreated, His people being fully redeemed, and His enemies being completely put under His feet in eternal and separated punishment (cf. Ephesians 1:10, 20-23; Hebrews 2:5-8).⁵

⁵ Carson has a very helpful paragraph explaining the reconciliation of verse 18: “The climax of the paragraph comes with the references to reconciliation and peacemaking through Christ’s death. The opening words of the paragraph had stated that all things had been created in, through and for Christ. He is their Lord in creation. What is not spelled out, however, is what has happened to all things since creation: the unity and harmony of the cosmos have suffered a serious breach, needing reconciliation (cf. Gn. 3). It was God’s good pleasure to reconcile all things through Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). Heaven and earth have been brought back to the order for which God made them. The universe is under its Lord, and cosmic peace has been restored. Reconciliation and *making peace* (which includes the idea of pacification, i.e. over-throwing evil) are used synonymously to describe the mighty work which Christ achieved in history through his death on the cross as a sacrifice (Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 11:25; Eph. 1:7). The *peace* which Christ has brought may be ‘freely accepted, or... compulsorily imposed’ (F. F. Bruce). The principalities and powers over whom God has triumphed (2:15) did not gladly surrender to God’s grace. They were ‘pacified’. They continue to exist, opposed to men and women (cf. Rom. 8:38-39), but they cannot finally harm the person who is in Christ and their overthrow in the future is assured (1 Cor. 15:24-28; see on 2:15). Further, it cannot be assumed from this verse that all sinful men and women have freely accepted the peace achieved through Christ’s death. Although all things will finally unite to bow in the name of Jesus and to acknowledge him as Lord (Phil. 2:10-11), it is not to be supposed that this will be done gladly by all, and to suggest that v 20 points to a universal reconciliation in which every person will finally enjoy the blessings of salvation is unwarranted” (Carson, D. A. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994. Colossians 1:20).

Also, “On the other hand, there is a sense in which even fallen angels and unredeemed men will be reconciled to God for judgment—but only in the sense of submitting to Him for final sentencing. Their relationship to Him will change from that of enemies to that of the judged. They will be sentenced to hell, unable any longer to pollute God’s creation. They will be stripped of their power and forced to bow in submission to God. Paul writes in Colossians 2:15 that after Christ ‘disarmed the rulers and authorities [fallen angels], He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them.’ Because of Christ’s victory, ‘the God of peace will-soon crush Satan under your feet’ (Rom. 16:20). And ‘at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth’ (Phil. 2:10). God has elevated Christ to a position above all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that God ‘raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet (Eph. 1:21-22)” (MacArthur, p. 58-59).

2. *Specific reconciliation (v. 21)*

While God has sovereignly initiated the general restoration of the universe, He has also graciously planned a more specific, spiritual reconciliation for His people. According to verse 21, “you,” that is, the Colossian believers, “hath He reconciled.” That incredible reality is highlighted by the seriousness of their previous predicament without Christ. Before they were saved, they were “alienated” from God, separated from the life of God. Ephesians explains their estranged status: they were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (2:2). Verse 21 also described the Colossians as “enemies” of God before salvation (cf. Romans 5:10). Their company, then, was death (I Corinthians 15:26), their commander, Satan (Matthew 13:39), and their consequence, destruction (I Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; 10:13).

According to our text, their estrangement was complete, their hostility was absolute, and their depravity was total. They were separated from God in their “mind” and in their “works.” Their reasoning or thought-processes were completely devoid of life and truth, for their “understanding [was] darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:18). Their “wicked works” simply gave evidence to darkened and deceived hearts that hate the light of truth and the life of righteousness (cf. John 3:19-20; Romans 1:18-19).

This is the state of all the lost. They are separated from God and hostile to Him in their mind and deeds. This description is reminiscent of the desperate picture of the lost in Titus 3:3. Bottom line, man’s sin and God’s attitude toward it are what continues to keep man in direct separation from and hostility to God (cf. Isaiah 59:2; Habakkuk 1:13; I John 1:6).⁶

Application: (1) After this point, the possibility of reconciliation seems remote at best. Thus, “The serious nature of [our] previous situation only serves to emphasize the wonder of God’s gracious, mighty action of reconciling [us], i.e. of making [us] His friends.”⁷ Reconciliation ought to daily fuel our praise to God, and our repentance from what He’s already delivered us from. (2) As we will see in a minute, everything that needed to be done for our reconciliation to God—our own change of status and God’s change of attitude—was completely fulfilled by Christ.



There is absolutely no possibility that a man can reconcile himself to God (cf. Romans 8:7-8). From Romans 5:6-11, what four reasons does Paul provide for why we cannot reconcile ourselves? *First, lack of strength:*

⁶ You will want to avoid a discussion of whether man was reconciled to God or visa versa, since this discussion is probably irrelevant. Cf. MacArthur, p. 59 for his understanding of this question.

⁷ Carson, Colossians 1:21-23.

“we were still helpless” (v. 6). *Second, lack of merit: we were “the ungodly” (v. 6). Third, lack of righteousness: “we were yet sinners” (v. 8). Finally, lack of peace with God: “we were enemies” (v. 10). It is only through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ that anyone can receive reconciliation (v. 11).*⁸

Transition: Having considered the need for reconciliation, we now turn to the solution to that need—the means of reconciliation.

THE MEANS OF RECONCILIATION (vv. 20a, 22a)

In the original language, the contrast between verses 21 and 22 is striking. Using the same phrase as Ephesians 2:13, Paul writes, “*But now* He has thoroughly reconciled you.”

1. *Through Jesus’ substitution for us.*

Against a tenant of the Colossian heresy that denied Jesus’ humanity, Paul purposefully states that our reconciliation occurs “by the body of His flesh.” Jesus was sent by God “in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, [and] He condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3 NASB). Jesus became a man to redeem and reconcile men. He didn’t come as a spirit or as an animal to die, which would have been ineffective; He became one of us to take our place—He is our substitute. Praise God!

Through Jesus’ incarnational substitution—both in His life and death—He was able to undo what the first man, our first representative Adam, did (cf. Romans 5:12-21; I Corinthians 15:45-49). Jesus brought obedience and life where Adam had initiated sin and death (I Corinthians 15:22). Thus, Jesus brings us back to God (I Peter 3:18).

2. *Through Jesus’ sacrifice for us.*

However, the incarnation alone was not enough to secure our restoration to God. Rather, Jesus’ incarnation into human flesh had one purpose—“death.” Both verse 20 and verse 22 underline the importance of Jesus’ death. Jesus “made peace”—a phrase synonymous with reconciliation—“through the blood of His cross” (v. 20); He has “reconciled [us]...through death” (v. 22). Jesus’ incarnation simply began the process of salvation, but His death would accomplish it.

It is important to consider what Paul is communicating here. What Paul states metaphorically in verse 20, he clarifies in verse 22—through His bloody death, Jesus is our sacrifice! There is nothing mystical or magical about Jesus’ blood. Its emphasis throughout Paul’s writing serves to

⁸ MacArthur, pp. 59-61.

THE GOAL OF RECONCILIATION (v. 22b)

demonstrate Jesus' atonement by connecting His death with the Old Testament sacrificial system (cf. Hebrews 13:11-12; I Peter 1:18-19). The sacrificial deaths in the Old Testament were violent or bloody deaths, in order to visibly picture the sacrificial loss of life (i.e., "the life of the flesh is in the blood," Leviticus 17:11). Jesus' death is what reconciles us to God, not His literal blood (Romans 5:10). When Hebrews 9:22 states that "without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (NASB), the phrase refers to a sacrificial death, not mere bleeding which could be accomplished without death. Furthermore, Jesus did not die by shedding His blood or bleeding to death (cf. John 19:34). He certainly did shed His blood in a violent death in order to fulfill the sacrifices of the Old Testament which pointed to Him; but His actual death occurred because He willed Himself to die (John 10:17-18; 19:30). MacArthur adds some clarification here:

The meaning of Scripture in this matter is not all that difficult to understand. Romans 5:9–10 clarifies the point; those two verses side by side show that to be "justified by His blood" (v. 9) is the same as being "reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (v. 10). The critical element in salvation is the sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf. The shedding of His blood was the visible manifestation of His life being poured out in sacrifice, and Scripture consistently uses the term "shedding of blood" as a metonym for atoning death.⁹

Jesus is our substitutionary sacrifice. Since we were alienated from and hostile to God (v. 21) and deserving of His wrath, reconciliation could occur only if (1) we were transformed, and (2) God's wrath toward us was appeased. Jesus Christ, in His physical and substitutionary life and death, accomplished both (cf. II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:24). His death in our place (i.e., substitution) and on our behalf (i.e., sacrifice) appeased (i.e., propitiated) the wrath of God (Romans 5:9; I Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; Hebrews 2:17) that we justly deserved (cf. Nahum 1:2; John 3:36; Ephesians 5:6). And when He rose from the tomb three days later, His resurrection life accomplished a transformation for all those in whom He dwells and who are "in Him," a recreation in which old things are passing away and all things are becoming new (II Corinthians 5:17-18). Reconciliation has been fully accomplished—i.e., God has been appeased, and we have been transformed—through Jesus who is alone sufficient for our salvation.

Transition: What we've already learned magnifies the glorious sufficiency of Christ to reconcile us to God. Our need was great, but His means of salvation was greater. Let us consider, thirdly, the goal of our reconciliation.

Jesus reconciled us to God so that He might present us before God as "holy and unblameable and unproveable" (v. 22b).

"Holy" deals with our relationship to God, as one set apart from sin unto God. Christ has accomplished this status before God (II Corinthians 5:21), exchanging our sin in Himself for His own righteousness to our account. Such holiness was the very position to which God chose us in eternity past (Ephesians 1:4), and God will settle for no less a position in His salvation of us.

"Unblameable" refers to blamelessness and shows us the character that Jesus has given to us through His work of reconciliation (cf. Ephesians 1:4; 5:27; Jude 24), making us just like Him in His unblemished sacrifice (Hebrews 9:14; I Peter 1:19). "Unproveable" means above reproach and demonstrates that "in Christ" no one can bring a charge against us (cf. Romans 8:33-34; I John 2:1).

According to this verse, those who have been reconciled stand "holy, blameless, and unproachable" "in [God's] sight" or "before Him." While in practice we will continue to struggle to live that way, in our position before God we have already obtained such perfection through Christ.

God sees us now as we will be in heaven when we are glorified. He views us clothed with the very righteousness of Jesus Christ. The process of spiritual growth involves becoming in practice what we are in reality before God. We "have put on the new self" and that new self "is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Col. 3:10).¹⁰

The Christians' present lives are lived in God's presence...God's act of reconciliation has already accomplished everything; perfection is thus not to be gained by one's striving. Rather, perfection is there to be received as God's gift and to be verified in the life of the Christians.¹¹

Such a dichotomy between our position and practice will not always exist, for part of God's reconciliatory work is to complete our salvation by causing us to be fully in practice what Christ has already made us in position (cf. I John 3:2). However, even now when God looks at us, He sees us "in Christ" and thus already "holy, unblameable, and unproveable." Therefore, "there is...now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

⁹ MacArthur, p. 63. For a further discussion by MacArthur on the New Testament's teaching about Jesus' bloody death, see pp. 61-63.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lohse, quoted in Melick, Richard R. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Electronic Ed., Logos Library System. *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 32. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001. P. 233.

Illustration: Consider the following illustration from John Phillips:¹²

“Let us picture a scene. Yonder in Heaven sits an omniscient God, and here we are on earth, sinners saved by grace. Satan appears in Heaven, as he did from time to time in the days of Job. He comes in the same character as “the accuser of the brethren.” His purpose in coming to God is to discredit us before all Heaven. Moreover, he does not come to tell lies about us. All he needs to do, sad to say, is tell the truth about us.

He approaches the throne and says, “Look at that man. Look at his filthiness. You know as well as I do the kind of thoughts he entertains in his mind, the kind of pictures his imagination paints. God answers, “All I can see is the precious blood of Christ. So far as I can see, he is holy. That sin is under the blood.”

Satan tries again. “Then look at his faults,” he says. “He’s full of them. He is totally inconsistent. He is full of flaws and blemishes. He is always stumbling and falling.” God says, “I see no faults. I see no flaws. He is ‘in Christ.’ He is unblameable, wholly without blemish. When I look at him, I see Jesus, and that’s good enough for Me. One of these days, he will indeed be like Jesus, for he will see Him as He is. Meanwhile, I see Christ when I see him. He is unblameable. He doesn’t have his resurrection body yet.”

Satan, ever persistent, tries again. “Look at the facts,” he says. “Why, I could recount to you a thousand instances where this person has broken Your laws, grieved Your Spirit, acted in the flesh, made a worldly decision, or erred from the truth. God says, “There are no such facts. This man is unproveable. Here, look in the books. See, his name has been blotted out of the book of the lost. It has been written instead in the Lamb’s Book of Life. The kind of ‘facts’ you mention have all been blotted out. I have chosen to remember them no more. The moment that sinner became a saved sinner, I willed his sins—past, present, and future—out of existence. He is unproveable from where I sit in Glory. Calvary covers it all. That man has been justified. You have no case.”

Such is the redeeming, justifying, reconciling grace of God. That is the meaning of our reconciliation. God sees us as holy, unblameable, and unproveable.



Application: What bearing should the goal of reconciliation have on our life? (1) John Phillips makes the following application: *“If that’s how God sees us, surely that is how we ought to see each other.”*

(2) As Paul will emphasize in the next point, we should cooperate with and continue in such a marvelous reconciliation, by living lives that are in practice, holy, blameless, and unproachable (cf. I John 3:3). (3) Such an eschatological goal should provide the daily hope and motivation to continue (v. 23).

Transition: Let us briefly summarize Paul’s teaching on reconciliation: we have been saved from a desperate need through the means of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice unto a glorious and perfected goal. Paul now ends his discussion of reconciliation with an applicational response for us. We should respond to such a gracious work of our Christ by living lives that evidence and exalt His sufficiency.

THE EVIDENCE OF RECONCILIATION (v. 23)

True believers who have been made “complete in Christ” (cf. Colossians 2:10) will also “continue” in Christ. Otherwise, their faith is shown to be non-saving and their relationship to Christ non-existent.

MacArthur accurately states the seriousness of this point:

One of the most sobering truths in the Bible is that not all who profess to be Christians are in fact saved [cf. Matthew 7:22-23]....Of all the marks of a genuine Christian presented in Scripture, none is more significant than the one Paul mentions here. People give evidence of being truly reconciled when they continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast [cf. Luke 8:13; John 8:31; 15:5ff; James 1:25; I John 2:19, 24-25; contrast with John 6:66].¹³

Those who have been truly reconciled to God will live lives that reflect that changed status. They will continue in the gracious work of Jesus to bring them back to God, and they will persevere in faith. Such “perseverance proves faith’s genuine character and is the fruit of reconciliation.”¹⁴

This human responsibility in no way undermines Christ’s sufficiency to save; rather, it serves to highlight it, as God’s power in the life of a true child of God so completely transforms him that he is enabled by Jesus’ grace to continue in his position in Christ. Such ability to persevere is unknown to the one outside of Christ, for only in Christ is such perseverance enabled by God’s own preservation (cf. I Peter 1:5). So, we could say, from God’s perspective, true “saints will persevere to the end”; from our perspective, “saints must persevere to the end.”¹⁵ We must “continue in the faith”!

¹³ MacArthur, p. 63.

¹⁴ McNaughton, Ian S. *Opening Up Colossians and Philemon*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006. P. 32.

¹⁵ Carson, Colossians 1:21–23.

¹² Phillips, John. *Colossians & Philemon in the John Phillips Commentary Series*. Colossians 1:22.

God's gracious enablement to persevere (i.e., our sanctification) comes through the same means as His initial salvation of us—"the hope of the gospel." Paul admonishes these believing Colossians to allow their gratitude for Christ's sufficiency in reconciliation to "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard" (v. 23). This "good news" is a unique and powerful message, one that Paul had himself faithfully continued in, thereby providing an example to these Colossian believer. Paul acknowledges that he had become "a minister" of the gospel¹⁶—a thought that becomes his focus in verses 24ff. As he continued to understand and proclaim the gospel, he could rejoice that the good news "was preached to every creature which is under heaven." This could better be translated, "the gospel...that is proclaimed in all creation"—that is, the gospel had been spread throughout the known world (substantially by Paul and those he had impacted),¹⁷ communicating its message of reconciliation.

The gospel should always be the stabilizing content of our faith. We must never move away from it, we must never forget it, we must never get over it, and we must never cease to proclaim it. In the message of the gospel is hope, hope that fuels our faith and fosters our faithfulness. "Men cannot add anything to the power of the blood of Jesus Christ by human effort, but God expects believers to exercise faith and embrace the hope that is found in the gospel. Christians are expected to continue believing in Christ Jesus all the days of their earthly life and to die in the hope of eternal life."¹⁸



Application: How do we "continue in the faith, grounded and settled...[not being] moved away from the hope of the gospel," thereby evidencing our experience of reconciliation to God? *Habitually... (1) praise God for it (vv. 3-8); (2) study it (vv. 9-22); (3) proclaim it (vv. 23-29); (4) seek to establish others in it (vv. 28-29); (5) stand for it (v. 24).*

¹⁶ "Perhaps it was of significance to those who were changing the gospel from what it was originally to what they wanted it to be. Paul had no proprietary interest in the gospel—it was not his. Rather, he was privileged to be servant to it.... He was subject to the gospel and privileged to be a part of its propagation. This identification with the gospel served to remind the church that... it had a stewardship responsibility with the things of God" (Melick, p. 235).

¹⁷ "Paul hardly meant that every person had heard the gospel. That would defeat the point of his mission and his intense desire to preach where Christ had not been proclaimed (cf. vv. 24ff). The point is that the gospel is the same gospel that was proclaimed from city to city. There is thus a universal aspect to the gospel which, as Bruce said, 'is a token of its divine origin and power.' Wherever the gospel has been preached, it is *this gospel* which has been proclaimed; there is no other" (Ibid.). "It has already been preached in representative towns and cities of the empire—Paul does not mean that every single individual has heard" (Carson, Colossians 1:21–23). "This is obviously a figure of speech indicating the universality of the gospel and its proclamation, not that every person on the globe heard Paul preach. In Acts 2:5 this phrase describes a wide range of people from various countries without including, for example, anyone from North or South America (cf. also Gen. 41:57; 1 Kings 10:24; Rom. 1:8)" (Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983. Colossians 1:23.).

¹⁸ McNaughton, p. 32.

CONCLUSION¹⁹

Perhaps no passage stresses the vital importance of reconciliation more than 2 Corinthians 5:17-21:

If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

In that powerful text we can discern five truths about reconciliation. First, reconciliation transforms men: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (v. 17). Second, it appeases God's wrath: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (v. 21). Third, it comes through Christ: "All these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (v. 18). Fourth, it is available to all who believe: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (v. 19). Finally, every believer has been given the ministry of proclaiming the message of reconciliation: God "gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18), and "He has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (v. 19).

God sends His people forth as ambassadors into a fallen, lost world, bearing unbelievably good news. People everywhere are hopelessly lost and doomed, cut off from God by sin. But God has provided the means of reconciliation through the death of His Son. Our mission is to plead with people to receive that reconciliation, before it is too late. Paul's attitude, expressed in verse 20, should mark every Christian: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

¹⁹ At the risk of over-quoting John MacArthur throughout this lesson, I'm going to let him provide our conclusion, for it is a fitting call for us to not only live out our reconciliation, but to invite others to join us in this sufficient grace of God. MacArthur, pp. 63-66.