

Colossians 1:20-23

Reconciliation

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Introduction

The word **reconcile** is one of the most significant and descriptive terms in all of Scripture. It is one of five key words used in the New Testament to describe the richness of salvation in Christ, along with **justification**, **redemption**, **forgiveness**, and **adoption**.

In **justification**, the sinner stands before God 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 (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 **adoption**, the sinner stands before God as a stranger, but is made a son (Eph. 1:5). In **reconciliation**, the sinner stands before God as an enemy, but becomes His friend (2 Cor. 5:18–20). A complete understanding of the doctrine of salvation would involve a detailed study of each of those terms. **In Colossians 1:20–23, Paul gives a concise look at reconciliation.**

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Introduction

The base word translated “**reconcile**” is used 3 times and speaks of **a change in relationship**. It is used to speak of reconciliation of a woman to her husband (1 Corinthians 7:11), and the other two speak of God and man being reconciled (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

The term used in our passage is slightly different. It is the same root word but combined with a preposition to intensify the meaning. **It means thoroughly, completely, or totally reconciled.**

Paul used this stronger term in Colossians as a counterattack against the false teachers. They denied the possibility of man’s being reconciled to God by Christ alone. In refuting that denial, Paul emphasizes that there is total, complete, and full reconciliation through the Lord Jesus. **Inasmuch as He possesses all the fullness of deity (1:19; 2:9), Jesus is able to fully reconcile sinful men and women to God (1:20).**

Paul defends Christ’s sufficiency to reconcile men to God by discussing four aspects of reconciliation: the plan of reconciliation, the means of reconciliation, the aim of reconciliation, and the evidence of reconciliation.

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Colossians 1:20-23

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. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— 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.

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The Plan of Reconciliation

Colossians 1:20

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God's ultimate plan for the universe is **to reconcile all things to Himself through Jesus Christ**. When His work of creation was finished, "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). God's good creation, however, was soon marred by man's sin. The Fall resulted not only in fatal and damning tragedy for the human race, but also affected the entire creation. **Sin destroyed the perfect harmony between creatures, and between all creation and the Creator**. The creation was "subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20) and "groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (Rom. 8:22). One evidence of that is the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which indicates that the universe is losing its usable energy. If God did not intervene, the universe would eventually run out of available energy.

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We live on a cursed earth in a cursed universe. Both are under the influence of Satan, who is both "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). The devastating effects of the curse and satanic influence will reach a terrifying climax in the events of the Tribulation. At the end of that time of destruction Christ returns and sets up His kingdom. During His millennial reign, the effects of the curse will be reversed. The Bible gives us a glimpse of what the restored creation will be like.

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There will be dramatic changes in the animal world.

Isaiah 11:6-9

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. ⁹They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea.

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The changes in the animal world will be paralleled by changes in the earth and the solar system.

Isaiah 24:23

Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the Lord of hosts will reign On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously.

Isaiah 60:19-20

The sun shall no longer be your light by day, Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, And your God your glory. ²⁰Your sun shall no longer go down, Nor shall your moon withdraw itself; For the Lord will be your everlasting light, And the days of your mourning shall be ended.

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The world will be reconciled to God. Paul writes, “The creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption” (Rom. 8:21). The curse of Genesis 3 will be removed. The universe will be restored to a proper relationship with its Creator. Finally, after the millennial kingdom, there will indeed be a new heaven and a new earth.

Revelation 21:1

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

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Paul is taking aim at the false teachers who taught that all matter was evil, and spirit was good. In their thinking, 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 that He will do it through His Son, Jesus Christ.** Far from being a spirit unconcerned with evil matter, Jesus is the agent through which God will accomplish the reconciliation of the universe.

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Some have imagined all things to include fallen men and fallen angels, and on that basis have argued for universalism, the ultimate salvation of everyone. By so doing they overlook a fundamental rule of interpretation - the principle that teaches that **no passage of Scripture, properly interpreted, will contradict any other passage**. When we let Scripture interpret Scripture, it becomes clear that fallen angels and unregenerate men will spend eternity in hell. (Matt. 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:10–15)

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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."**

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Through the sacrifice of Christ, God made provision for the world (cf. John 3:16; 1 John 2:2), all persons will not be reconciled to God in the saving sense of being redeemed. The benefits of Christ's atonement are applied only to those who come to saving faith in Him.

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The Plan of Reconciliation

Colossians 1:21

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.

From God's general plan to reconcile all things to Himself, **Paul turns to the specific reconciliation of believers like the Colossians.** Their reconciliation was evidence that Christ was sufficient to reconcile men and women to God. Their reconciliation foreshadowed the ultimate reconciliation of the universe.

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To impress on them Christ's power to reconcile men to God, Paul reminds the Colossians of what they were like before their reconciliation. They **were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works**. The term "alienated" means "estranged," "cut off," or "separated." Before their reconciliation, the Colossians were completely estranged from God. In a similar passage, Paul writes, "at that time you 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."¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:12–13).

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The Colossians had also been **enemies in their mind**. The term "**enemies**" could also be translated "**hateful**." Unbelievers are not only alienated from God by condition, but also hateful of God by attitude. They hate Him and resent His holy standards and commands because they are **engaged in wicked works**. Scripture teaches that unbelievers "loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19–20). **Their problem is not ignorance, but willful love of sin.**

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Romans 1:21–24

Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Sin is the root cause of man's alienation from God. Because God cannot fellowship with sin (cf. Hab. 1:13; 1 John 1:6), it is sin that needs to be dealt with before God and man can be reconciled.

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The question arises as to whether man is reconciled to God, or

God to man. There is a sense in which both occur. Since “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God” (Rom. 8:7), and “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8), **reconciliation cannot take place until man is transformed.**

“Therefore, 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**” (2 Cor. 5:17–18).

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There is also God's side to reconciliation. From His holy perspective, His just wrath against sin must be appeased. Far from being the harmless, tolerant grandfather that many today imagine Him to be, God "takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies" (Nah. 1:2). The one who refuses to obey the Son will find that "the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

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Man and God could never be reconciled unless God's wrath was appeased. The provision for that took place through **Christ's sacrifice**. "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him" (Rom. 5:9). It is "Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10). He bore the full fury of God's wrath against our sins (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24).

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Christ's death on the cross reconciled us to God (Eph. 2:16), something we could never have done on our own.

In Romans 5:6–10, Paul gives four reasons for that.

First, **lack of strength**: “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).

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So What

We need to remember who and what we were. It is easy to judge others forgetting that we were the same. Our reconciliation with God through Jesus' sacrifice should drive us to praise and thanksgiving.

If there is anyone who has not accepted God's offer for reconciliation, I strongly encourage you to do this today.

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