

COLOSSIANS
Jesus Christ: Supreme Over The New Creation
Colossians 1:18-23

INTRODUCTION

Why am I so unhappy? Why don't I have peace within me? Why am I unsettled and insecure in my soul about life? These are the kinds of questions I often hear from people who are searching for the answers to life. These folks quite often have money, success, prestige and education but inward peace has eluded them.

The answer I give these people may seem over simplistic but I do believe my answer hits the heart of the problem. I tell them they need to be at peace with God and that peace can only come through Jesus Christ. Christ alone can bring us from a place of fear, insecurity, uncertainty and frustration to a place of peace.

Last week we learned how Christ is supreme over the old creation (the universe) and today we learn how He is supreme over the new creation (the church). Last week we saw how the Apostle Paul declared Jesus Christ to be God come in the flesh, He is truly God and truly man. Today we see how Christ reconciles the universe and sinners to Himself. In 1:15-17, we saw that Christ is to the creation - Creator! In 1:18-23, we see what Christ is to the church - Head.

CHRIST'S PERSON 1:18-19a

Christ The Head of The Church (1:18a): *And he is the head of the body, the church.*

Who makes up the church? What church is Paul talking about? The word "church" in the Greek means "called out ones." So the true church, the universal church, the catholic church is in view here, and this church is made up of everyone who has ever believed in Christ as Savior and Lord; all born-again, blood bought Christians; the community of the redeemed and all who have determined to follow Christ. ***"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."*** (Jn. 10:27,28). This church is known only to God. Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Mennonites, Roman Catholics, Independents, Episcopalians who have trusted Christ make up this invisible church. However, many within all these denominations are not true Christians because they have never genuinely submitted to the Lordship of Christ. This mighty congregation has never gathered together yet, but one day the trumpet will blow and Christ will come; the dead in Christ will rise first and we who are alive at His coming will be caught up (raptured) to be with Christ forever. O what a glorious day!

John Wesley told about one of his dreams. He died and went to the gates of heaven where he met the Lord guarding the gate. He said to the Lord, "Are there any Baptists up here?" And the Lord said, "No." "I thought so said Wesley, they are too dogmatic." "Are there any Presbyterians?" "No." "I guessed it," said Wesley, "that doctrine of predestination will keep anyone out of heaven." "Are there any Episcopalians?" "No." "Any Roman Catholics?" "No." He went through every denomination and the answer was "No." Finally, assured that heaven had to be populated with someone, and he had not yet mentioned his own Methodist denomination, he said rather arrogantly, "Are there any Methodists up here?" And the Lord answered, "No, not even one." "Well, said Wesley, who is here?" The Lord answered, "Only Christians are here."

The church is called a body which implies it is a living organism, composed of members who share the resurrected life of Jesus Christ, and apart from one another this body is incomplete.

Christ is the Head of the universal church. The Head of the church is not in Rome, New York or Salt Lake City. There is only one head and that is Christ! Christ controls, directs and guides the true church, and it is through the church He carries out His purposes for His people and the world. Christ is the guiding spirit for the church and without Him we are powerless, and at His bidding the church must live and move.

The church must submit to Christ as Head and we are to submit to His authority as it is found in the Bible. We must also seek Christ's face in diligent prayer so He can lead His people. God supernaturally leads His church through prayer. This is why our Lord said in Luke 18:1: "***Men should always pray and not give up.***"

Christ the Beginning Of The Church (1:18b): ***He is the beginning*** --The beginning of what? Christ is the beginning of the New Covenant aspect of the church. Jesus Christ is the origin and source of the church's life, the very fount of its being. He is the beginning of the new, spiritual creation (II Cor. 5:17).

Christ Is The Life Of The Church (1:18c): ***And the firstborn from among the dead,*** --Christ was the firstborn from the dead in that when He was resurrected, He never died again. As we pointed out last week, "firstborn" means priority and sovereignty. Christ was sovereign over death and the first never to die again. Others like Lazarus were brought back from the dead but they had to die again. Lazarus experienced a resuscitation, not a resurrection.

Because Christ was raised from the dead to life eternal, all of God's people will be raised from the dead to eternal bliss.

The church shares the resurrection life of Christ. All Christians because of their union with Christ have resurrection life flowing through their beings. It is resurrection life which makes the church the most exciting entity in the world.

Christ Is The Supreme One (1:18d): ***So that in everything he might receive the supremacy.*** -- Because Christ is sovereign over creation, sovereign over the church and sovereign over death, He is the Supreme One of the universe. He is to occupy the chief place! He is to be pre-eminent! He is to be first in everything!

I read recently about a group of teenagers who were Christian who wanted to start a club. They called it the 1-18 Club. We would understand if it was called the 3-16 Club or the 8-28 Club, but the 1-18 Club. It was from Colossians 1-18: "That in all things He might have the preeminence." Out of this club many young people went to the mission field and became pastors and other dynamic workers in the church.

Christ Is The True God (1:19a): ***For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,*** -- This is a positive declaration to refute the Gnostic false teachers who said that Christ was a created being, one of the many emanations (aeons, demiurges) or angelic being evolving out from God. The Gnostics referred to God as the Plaroma (fullness, completeness). What Paul is saying here is that the Plaroma dwelt in Christ. The word "fullness" is the Greek word plaroma.

Jesus Christ had to be God to be resurrected from the dead, and He had to be God to reconcile all the universe and God's people.

Jesus Christ is God. He demands our hearts, our loyalty, our possessions, and our person! He alone is worthy of worship because He is God.

If President Reagan entered a room, men would stand to their feet and applaud. If Queen Elizabeth entered the room, men would stand and perhaps bow or genu flex. If Jesus Christ entered the room, men would fall flat on their faces and worship him because they would know they are in the presence of Deity.

CHRIST'S WORK - RECONCILER 1:19b-23

Reconciliation Of The Universe: ***And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace on earth or through blood, shed on the cross.***

Paul seems to be teaching a non-saving reconciling work of Christ which affects everything in the universe. "All things" literally says "the all things," and must refer to the universe as a whole. In His death, Christ reconciled everything in the universe to Himself. The whole universe of things, creatures, angels and people shall be restored to God sometime in the future based on the death of Christ.

Colossians 1:20 caused an early church father, Origen, to conclude that if all things are going to be reconciled in the universe to Christ than ultimately even the lost in hell will be reconciled. He even said the Devil and his demons would be reconciled. Origen taught universalism, which says ultimately all men will be saved. In 1987, there are many universalists like Origen who occupy many pulpits in America. They are called modernist, liberals, neo-orthodox and new evangelicals. They, like Origen, are guilty of a great heresy, and cannot be saved if they believe all men will ultimately be saved.

The meaning of “reconciliation” in its basic form is “a complete restoration to a previous state of harmony” and in its broader form means “to change from an enemy to a friend.” The fundamental thought in “reconciliation” is the removal of hostility.” The universe is somehow out of sink, out of harmony, out of joint because of sin caused by Satan's rebellion and Adam's Fall, and the universe will be set right by Christ's reconciling work on the cross.

This reconciliation involves “things in heaven” and things on earth.” Obviously Christ's reconciling work will free the earth from the curse of sin: ***“The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”*** (Rom. 8:20,21). His death will somehow reconcile things in heaven for at least a portion of heaven needs to be cleansed because Satan rebelled and one-third of the angelic hosts followed Satan in this sin. We know that the death of Christ does somehow cleanse heavenly things: ***“It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.”*** (Heb. 8:23).

Since “all things” must include unsaved men and evil angels, then reconciliation means basically “the removal of hostility.” God does not choose to reconcile lost men and evil angels in the same way He reconciles sinful men to Himself. There are basically two ways to end hostility. God can lovingly, through the work of Christ, change a person from an enemy to a friend by a sovereign act of grace, or God can subjugate His enemies through sovereign force. In either case, hostility ceases - one willingly and the other unwillingly. Unsaved men, the Devil and demons will be reconciled to Christ but not through saving grace but sovereign subjection. Outward hostility against God will stop for unsaved men but they will be subjugated in hell forever.

In WWII there was a great deal of hostility between the Allied Powers and the Axis Powers. When the Allies won the war, there was reconciliation but it was by force. We subjugated the Axis Powers and there was outward peace, but many Germans held contempt and hate in their hearts towards their conquerors. They were reconciled through subjugation. Reconciliation can only come about by subjugation or by grace. Unsaved men and evil angels are subjugated and reconciled to Christ by force. Saved men are reconciled by grace through the death of Christ.

In Philippians 2:9,10, it says, ***“Therefore God exalted him (Christ) to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and in earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** Whatever else this teaches, it does mean all things eventually are to be actively subdued to God's sovereign will and made to serve His purpose. In eternity future, some will acknowledge Christ's Lordship as redeemed in heaven. Others will reluctantly, with gritted teeth acknowledge Christ's Lordship while they waste away in hell.

The Bible in no way teaches universalism. In fact, it teaches that there is eternal judgment: ***“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*** (Matt. 25:46). All men will not be saved. There will be no second chances. Only those who trust Christ will be saved and they will cry before the throne one day, “Worthy is the Lamb!” Those who reject Christ will say, “I still hate Christ; I still refuse His Lordship but I do reluctantly acknowledge that He is Lord and I'm lost because I refused to bow myself to Him when I had the chance.”

Reconciliation of God's People

The Need. ***Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*** --Paul now moves from the reconciliation of the universe to the specific reconciliation of sinful men. He starts out showing why they needed to be reconciled before they were Christians. Unsaved folks are enemies of God in their minds - they have developed a whole way of thinking which excludes God. The result of this is evil behavior or a sinful lifestyle which shuts God out of life. All men, women, boys and girls outside of Christ are hostile to God, at war with Deity and hate God and His authority. Man declares his own independence of God and rebels at God.

You may be saying, “I don't feel like an enemy of God. I don't murder, commit adultery, get drunk, cheat or steal. Surely I'm not as bad as the Bible says I am.” Yes you are. The worse sin of all is selfishness. Your natural way is always hostile to God's way. You may not be a total rejecter of God but you want God on your own terms rather than His. You are a rebel because you will not bow down your will to the sovereign God and His holy law as it is revealed in the Bible. You do not have to be an atheist or a communist to be an enemy of God. You do not have to be an idolater or a witch. Anyone who denies God or perverts who God is, or makes a God of his own imagination is an enemy of God. It is possible to be within the pale of a church and have money, or sex, or power, or pleasure as your God. This person is an enemy of God. Why? Because he wants his own way and not God's way. If you are not willing to accept the Christ of Scripture, then you are an enemy because you are calling God a liar.

The Means. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death... --When we were enemies, haters of God, self-worshippers, living immoral lives, Christ reconciled us to the Father. The words “But now” are sweet to the ear. Christ through His death changed us from an enemy to a friend, from enmity to amnesty, from hatred to love. God took the initiative in grace. He did a sovereign gracious act at the Cross for sinful people. Think of it, we are friends

of God; He loves us; He cares for us; He understands us. Why? Because in sovereign grace we were reconciled to God.

D.L. Moody often illustrated reconciliation by this story:

A boy quarreled with his father. It was all the boy's fault. The father held nothing against the son, but the boy left home in anger. He corresponded with his mother and she begged him by letter to come home and be reconciled with his father, but he would not. Then one day the son received a letter that his mother was very sick and later received a telegram that his mother was dying. The son hurried home to be beside his mother in her death. When he got home, he hurried up the stairs to the room where he knew his mother was near death. There on the opposite side of the bed stood his father. His mother pleaded for him to be reconciled to his father but he refused. Finally, the mother took the right hand of the boy in her right hand, and the right hand of the father in her left hand. She put the two hands together over her breast and asked them to be reconciled, and then she fell back on the pillow dead. Then the boy looked up and said, "Father!" These two were reconciled by the death of the mother. The same happened at Calvary. The Lord Jesus reconciled sinners to the Father through His death for sin.

The Purpose. ***To present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation*** -- The purpose of reconciliation is that the Christian will be one day presented morally holy and without spot before God at the Judgment seat. Not only that but because of Christ's work, no man, nor Satan nor God Himself can accuse us of our sins because Christ shed His blood for us and reconciled us to the Father.

To be morally holy, without blemish and free of accusation will be a total reality at death or when Christ comes. However, we can seek holiness of life and blamelessness now and achieve it to some degree in this life. However, we will never be perfect or close to it!

The Condition: ***If you continue in your faith, established firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel that you heard and has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*** --Reconciliation is a fact for all true believers in Christ. However, for a person to experience the effects of reconciliation, he must continue in the faith; that is, continue to exercise faith. The "if" is there to challenge the reality of one's faith. Remember some of these Colossians were thinking about leaving Christianity and following the heresy of the Gnostics.

Paul is not saying we keep ourselves saved by perseverance, but through perseverance we show, give proof, give evidence for the reality of true faith in us. Any "if clause" in the Bible is used by God to challenge one's profession of faith as to its reality: ***"And we are his house, if we hold onto our courage and the hope of which we boast."*** (Heb. 3:6). ***"We have come to share in***

Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.” (Heb. 3:14). Paul is not saying a man can be saved and then lost. He is saying that a man's original profession of faith in Christ can be known as genuine only by one's willingness to follow Christ by faith. If a man professes and falls away, his profession was not genuine; he was never saved in the first place.

CONCLUSION

Do you feel estranged from God? In your lifestyle are you fighting God? Do you find your emotions at war with the Almighty? Do you hate God's law? The Bible says you are an enemy of God. You are at war with God. You are not seeking God. You are hostile to all He is and stands for. Your destiny is eternal judgment!

But I have good news for you. Christ died to reconcile sinners to God. In His death, He made it possible to become a friend of God. Hostilities can cease. You can be at peace.

How can you get this peace? Sheath your sword. Lay down your weapons. Stop fighting God and accept the fact Christ died for you and reconciled you to God. By faith, accept Christ who made peace between God and man. Trust Christ, the Peacemaker, and you will have peace with God.