

## As it was in the Beginning

### Colossians 1.19-23

Scripture reading: John 1.1-18

A woman was in the local library with her four month old daughter. She browsed through the books, while the child babbled softly – content and happy. It was a good day . . . but then a gruff old man shattered it, "Tell that kid to shut up, or I will." Instinctively, the woman responded, "I am very sorry for whatever in your life caused you to be so disturbed by a happy baby, but I will *not* tell her to shut up, and I will not let you do so either."

The woman braced herself, expecting an outburst of obscenities from him. Instead, he looked down, took a deep breath, and said softly, "I apologise." When at last he looked up again, his eyes were brimming with tears. The mother and the old man were now locked in stunned silence. Finally, he looked at the little girl. With child-like innocence, she smiled back at him and gleefully kicked her arms and legs. He wiped his tears and said slowly, "My son died when he was 2-months-old."

Suddenly compassionate, the woman pulled up a chair next to him. "I'm so sorry." The old man then explained that his son died from SIDS over 50 years before. He described how his anger grew, destroying his marriage and leaving him lonely and isolated. "Tell me about your son," the woman invited. As he did so, he smiled back and forth with the little girl. Eventually, he asked to hold her. As he held her, his shoulders relaxed, and he briefly laid his cheek on her head before handing her back with a heartfelt "Thank you."<sup>1</sup> In that moment, the old man's bitter heart was reconciled.

Reconciliation matters because relationships matter. That old man was estranged from his wife; estranged from God, because of his anger. For 50 years it ate at him like a cancer, repulsing anyone who came near. How many people today, like him, carry a heavy heart because they are estranged?

Estrangement happens so easily. All it takes is a careless word. A cruel deed. Sometimes only a perceived attitude – 'he doesn't like me', 'she's stuck on herself.'

If we have a headache, we can take a Panadol and find relief. But what soothes a violated heart?

When something comes between a husband and a wife, a mother and a daughter, a friend and a friend, or even a people group and another people group – like Aborigines and European settlers . . . the pain, as with that old man, is often all consuming.

Reconciliation matters . . . and yet it is so rare.

The dictionary says that to be reconciled is *to become friendly with someone after estrangement*. I think that is too simplistic. Isn't it possible to be friendly toward someone who has hurt you? Have you ever pretended to be friendly to someone you really didn't like? It happens all the time.

Reconciliation means more than being friendly. It means restoring a whole and harmonious relationship by the total satisfaction of dividing offenses.

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Sometimes that satisfaction happens with a simple apology – like the mother and the old man. Sometimes it takes more.

How much does it take with God? Our sin has estranged us from Him. We have violated His holiness. There is a wall of separation between us.

Can we be reconciled with a simple apology? Can we be reconciled with good works?

No. It takes more, much more. There must be total satisfaction of the dividing offenses. And that requires blood. Innocent, pure blood.

Sermon in a Sentence: **Reconciliation is much more than forgive and forget.**

Look at how Paul describes reconciliation in Colossians 1.19-23.

Colossians 1:19-23 (ESV)

<sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, **making peace by the blood of his cross.**

<sup>21</sup>And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup>**he has now reconciled** in his body of flesh **by his death**, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup>if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

What we've just read is extraordinary . . . and necessary. **Reconciliation is much more than forgive and forget.** Notice three extraordinary facts about reconciliation in this text.

## 1. The Extraordinary Agent of Reconciliation

Colossians 1:19-20 (ESV)

<sup>19</sup>For in him **all the fullness of God** was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace **by the blood** of his cross.

Jesus Christ is the extraordinary agent of reconciliation. He is extraordinary because He is both fully God, and fully human.

### a. The Divine Son of God (v 19)

Verse 19 is difficult to translate. It is not hard to understand – just hard to put into English.

When we read in our English translations something like this:

Colossians 1:19 (NKJV)

<sup>19</sup>For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell,

We could come up with two very different interpretations. Does this mean that God dwelt in the man Jesus? Or that that the man Jesus is God? Two separate beings? Or one and the same?

You remember from last Sunday that these questions must always be solved by definition and context. That's how we interpret the Bible. So, let's begin with definition. What is fullness?

Fullness is actually a common concept in the Bible – and it only applies to God. God filled the tabernacle and the temple with His glory (Ezekiel 44.4). We're told elsewhere that the whole earth is filled with His glory (Numbers 14.21). This is the attribute of God that we call immensity. God is not only everywhere at the same time (omnipresence), but He also fills everywhere at the same time.

A favourite Sunday School song is "My God is so Big". Fullness is bigness. And in God's case, that bigness is too big to measure or imagine. So how do you put all of that in one man, Jesus?

This was actually a controversy in Colossae. John MacArthur explains that a heresy had crept into the church – that God was too big for the one man Jesus, so He divided His attributes between 'various emanations'. This, of course, fit well with Greek Mythology.

But Paul rebukes this heresy. All the fullness is in Jesus alone. The omnipresence of God – in Jesus. The omnipotence of God – in Jesus. The omniscience of God – in Jesus. The eternity of God – in Jesus. The immensity of God – in Jesus. The glory of God – in Jesus. And we haven't even started on God's holiness, love, mercy, etc. – all in Jesus.

Colossians 2:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> For in him **the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,**

How do we explain this? There is only one way. The definition of fullness is not that God came upon the man Jesus, but that the man Jesus is God.

This, of course, is the clear indication of the context – as we saw last week. Jesus is the creator (v 16). Jesus is the sustainer (v 17). Jesus is the originator of the Church (v 18). Jesus is the reconciler or redeemer (v 20). Only God has these abilities and qualities.

How extraordinary is this? That God Himself would be the agent of our reconciliation. Talk about love! But there is another side to this that is equally amazing.

## **b. The Human Son of God (v 20)**

Just as Jesus has the fullness of God . . . He also became the fullness of humanity. He was born. He was nurtured by parents. He learned. He got hungry. He felt pain. He was estranged.

In verse 20, we read that reconciliation was achieved by His blood – blood is the essence of human life.

Colossians 1:20 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace **by the blood of his cross.**

So the way we should understand this is that Jesus was, is and always will be God – in every attribute and dimension – fullness. God did not merely come upon a man named Jesus. Rather Jesus, who is God, took humanity upon Himself. In other words, a man did not become God. Rather, God became a man.

And that was for your reconciliation. Do you see that **reconciliation is much more than forgive and forget?**

That's the extraordinary agent. Now let's think about . . .

## 2. The Extraordinary Recipient of Reconciliation

Reconciliation must always go in two directions. It must reach from the offended party to the offending party. The reconciliation Jesus achieved with His blood, fully satisfies the offense and purifies the offender.

### a. Cosmic – all things (v 20)

Colossians 1:20 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether **on earth or in heaven**, **making peace** by the blood of his cross.

The key phrase is 'all things'. Paul helps us understand what is meant by 'all things' by adding 'on earth or in heaven'. We on earth were estranged from God who is in heaven. And God who is in heaven was estranged from we who are on earth.

I remind you of the definition of reconciliation I gave earlier: 'restoring a whole and harmonious relationship (peace) by the total satisfaction of dividing offenses.' All things means total satisfaction. The wrath of God against our sin was fully satisfied by Jesus' blood on the cross so that we have peace with God.

In theological terms, this is called propitiation. God, being by very nature holy and just, must punish sinners – He cannot simply overlook our offense; He cannot simply forgive and forget. Sin must be paid for.

Think of it this way. The word 'reconciliation' is used by accountants. When an account has every expenditure listed and all the sums match up, we say it is reconciled. If, however, the bank balance does not match the ledger, then we say it needs to be reconciled.

God's account is perfection. Our ledger, on the other hand, is plagued by imperfections. The accounts must be reconciled before that eternal audit at the judgement of God. But where can we get enough resources to satisfy our debt?

Jesus paid it all.

1 John 4:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

So, in this sense, God Himself is the extraordinary recipient of His own reconciliation. He is satisfied. In another sense, we are also extraordinary recipients.

#### **b. Personal – aliens and enemies (v 21)**

What makes this extraordinary is that we were so undeserving. Listen to how Paul describes us.

Colossians 1:21 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup>And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

This is true of every person who has ever lived, except Jesus. We are alienated from God because of our sin. And we are hostile towards God because of our sin – every time we do an evil deed, we are essentially shaking our fist in God's face.

For the Gentile Colossians (and for us) there is another dimension to this alienation and hostility. Ethnically, we were excluded from God's family and nation. We are not Jewish, therefore, we have no claim to be God's people.

Except by reconciliation through the blood of Jesus.

Extraordinary recipients. God is extraordinary because He is so holy. We are extraordinary because we are so evil. Reconciliation brings us both together.

That's much more than forgive and forget.

So we've seen an extraordinary agent – Jesus, and extraordinary recipients – God and us. Now we come to . . .

### **3. The Extraordinary Outcome of Reconciliation**

Can the broken really be mended – good as new? Can the rough really be made plain – perfectly smooth? Can the crooked really be made straight? Can sinners be saints?

Yes. But it wasn't easy.

#### **a. A High Cost (v 22a)**

Colossians 1:22 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup>he has now reconciled in his **body of flesh** by his **death** . . .

It is good that Paul repeats this. We must never forget that reconciliation is much more than forgive and forget.

This is why we are serving communion today. It is a tangible reminder of how much reconciliation costs. Our offense had to be satisfied.

It is also good to remember that Jesus accomplished our reconciliation once and for all. Notice the verse says 'He has now reconciled'. It is finished.

What an extraordinary outcome! But there is more . . .

## b. A High Holiness (vv 22b-23)

Colossians 1:22-23 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you **holy** and **blameless** and **above reproach** before him,

Holy, blameless, above reproach – what an extraordinary outcome! But it is only by Christ’s presentation. As the hymn writer puts it, ‘robed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne, on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

Speaking of sinking sand, is that how we should understand verse 23?

<sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Is Paul saying that you could lose your reconciliation; your salvation? No. The implied expectation is that all who are genuinely reconciled will always persevere.

This is the doctrine we call the perseverance of the saints. Reconciliation not only restores our relationship with God, it transforms us into new creations.

Where there is a person who is not stable and steadfast; who shifts from the gospel; the concern is that they were never reconciled in the first place. For if they were, they would persevere. Because ‘He who began a good work in you will complete it until the Day of Jesus Christ.’ (Philippians 1.6).

Aren’t you glad that reconciliation is much more than forgive and forget? We needed to be changed . . . and God achieved this extraordinary outcome through Christ’s blood.

If you are reconciled, you are holy, blameless, and above reproach.

We have seen, then, that reconciliation is extraordinary. It is achieved by an extraordinary agent – the God man Jesus Christ. It is applied to extraordinary recipients – the holy God and evil humanity. And it has extraordinary outcomes – a once for all payment making people once for all time holy.

Romans 5:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.