

COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 1:15-20(e)

Lesson #7

Introduction & Review

Last week was part 4 of our study of these verses in Colossians dealing with Jesus Christ, and most specifically with His preeminent place and position in all creation, including past, present, and future. The amount of information that's conveyed in just these six verses is substantial, but it's the content of that information that's absolutely amazing. This is much more than information, this is true revelation, and it's all about Jesus.

Verse 15 starts out with the declaration that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. We're told elsewhere in scriptures that God the Father isn't made of physical matter like we are, so He isn't visible to our eyes like people are. This means that He and us are of fundamentally different categories. He's the invisible, and we're the visible. Now this has some obvious ramifications. The most obvious is that even though we both exist, we can't see and touch each other, because of the difference of our fundamental makeup and plane of existence.

We can send messages of sorts back and forth, and He can see us just fine, because we're tangible, but we still can't see Him, even though we get His messages. What kind of messages does He send us? Well, first he created a whole tangible physical universe that's made up of the same kinds of matter that we are, that is, it's visible and touchable. In this universe he also put some invisible forces that we can recognize but can't see or understand. At first people refused to believe most of these forces existed, but as time went by, and man learned more and more about this creation, he came to understand many of these things. And now we almost all carry little plastic and metal boxes on our belts that we call cell phones, that let us talk audibly with anybody in the whole world at anytime, over invisible waves of energy that nobody can see or touch. We've come to see these devices as just simple and ordinary conveniences, but 100 years ago, we would have been ridiculed for even suggesting such a possibility might really exist. But, from things such as this, and many more, we see that there is an invisible realm that exists, and it functions by it's own set of laws and rules that we can't see, but we can come to understand and interrelate with these things.

Then, we have His written word, the holy scriptures. These are visible and tangible and understandable. They tell us in plain language who God is and what He commands. They reveal His nature and holiness to us, as well as His power and sovereign authority. They tell us of His love for us, and the great lengths He's gone to on our behalf. They tell us that He has standards that He expects us to learn and to honor. And, they tell us what lies in the eternal future for every living thing ever created. If we're willing to listen, they tell us everything we need to know about how to live in a vibrant and prosperous relationship with this invisible, but almighty, God who is our creator.

By these created things that we can see, and the things that we can't see but can understand and interrelate with, we're told that all mankind is accountable to God for acknowledging that our existence is by Him, as there is no other sensible and rational explanation than an intelligent creator with infinite knowledge and omnipotent power.

But now, on top of all of this that had existed for at least four thousand years, we get a tangible and visible man who declares that He's the Son of this invisible creator God, and He's been sent by Him to bring us a message. He freely, and frequently, authenticates Himself by doing utterly impossible things that normal, mortal, human beings simply cannot do. He leaves no reasonable doubt that He has come from this invisible creator God.

It seems like, from what we've just heard, that everyone in the whole world would have been excited and overjoyed about His appearance into the visible and tangible realm of ours. The almighty God, about whom they had read and heard, was now visible, in the shape of a human man, and walking among His own creatures. He was miraculously healing the sick of every kind, restoring the sight of the blind, making arms and legs work that had been faulty from birth, and actually raising the dead back to life. The things that He did in their plain sight were irrefutable authentication that he was indeed the Son of God. And he told them this with His own words as well.

Now it certainly seems like this should have had a happy outcome. The invisible God, was now among His people and showing His compassion and love for mankind by doing wonderful works of kindness. But something went tragically wrong. What was it that caused everything to take such a turn? It wasn't the wonderful works that He did, they all loved them, it was the message that He brought. He came to tell mankind that they are sinful and evil, and must either repent of their sins or suffer the inevitable wrath of God.

This was not what mankind wanted to hear. In fact, it was just the opposite. Some wanted to hear that He was a loving God who wouldn't hold man's actions against them. Others, the religious, actually wanted to be praised and complimented for their piety. Imagine the reaction of those who wanted Him to be a loving and forgiving God, when they were told that every deed they ever committed will be recorded in a book, and must be accounted for at the final judgement. And perhaps even worse, imaging those who were expecting high praise from Him, when He calls them hypocrites and snakes, and tells them that they're blind and impoverished slaves of sin, and their father is the devil.

It wasn't what Jesus did that caused the ruckus, it was what He said that caused it. When He was confronted by the religious elite they asked Him to plainly say whether He was, or was not, the promised Messiah for which they were waiting. For them, the repeated intimations, backed up with irrefutable miracles wasn't enough. In fact, nothing that Jesus might have done would have changed their minds, because they would not accept the message He was presenting. Even though it clearly came from God. If He had changed the message, and told them something they wanted to hear, then they would have immediately accepted Him as their Messiah. But that wasn't an option for Jesus, and it isn't an option for us either, even though that's exactly what's become popular today. When confronted on the issue of just exactly who He was, listen to His response on one particular occasion: (Out of John chapter 10)

22 At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; 23 it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. 24 The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. 26 "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 "I and the Father are one ."

31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" 33 The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."

John 10:22-33 (NASB)

So what was the offense? It was that this man who had earlier called them hypocrites and snakes was now calling Himself God, and if that were so, then His assessment of them must be true. And they were willing to kill Him, if they could, before they would consider the possibility that He was speaking the truth about them. Nobody objected to the miraculous healings and deeds of compassion done by Jesus, it was the message that He had been commissioned by God the Father to proclaim; that's what made them furious, and they staunchly refused to accept it. Jesus went on to prove that point when he said to them:

36 do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? 37 "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 38 but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." 39 Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.

John 10:36-39 (NASB)

Unless God the Father specifically draws our hearts, initially through conviction of our sins, we, as humans, will not accept the message of Jesus, regardless of the quantity or magnitude of the miracles we're presented with. This is precisely the point that's being shown by the 40 years of wandering in the desert by the Jews, who, with their own eyes, saw the 10 plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and the water flow out of a rock, and countless other inexplicable works that could only have been done by an Omnipotent God; but still continued in unbelief, and missed the promised land.

Just like those who saw all the miracles performed by Jesus, likewise, if what those people who came out of Egypt, saw with their own eyes, touched with their own hands, and heard with their own ears, wasn't sufficient to produce in them saving faith, then it can only be reasonably concluded that there is nothing whatsoever in the world that can, except the sovereign gift of God. (Eph 2:8-9, Jn 6:37, 10:27-29)

The plan of salvation prepared by God is one that wholly and completely eliminates any self credit, or self participation, or even self desire, from the part of the recipient. It is a sovereign, unmerited, and even initially unsought for, gift of God, and all the credit, and all the glory for it, goes entirely to Him. And thus He absolutely demands, for He shares His glory with none. It's only the heart that's been broken over sin, by the mercy of God, that's properly readied for salvation. The proud heart isn't even eligible. This was the whole ministry function of John the Baptist, to ready the hearts of the elect to hear the message of forgiveness of sins for those who sought to repent.

Part 5

THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST **(In the Master Plan of God)**

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Col 1:15-20 (NASB)

Verse 20a:

and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself,

The first thing that we need to clearly understand here is that there is a reconciliation that must take place. And the One who must be reconciled is God, not man. Unless God is entirely satisfied by the atonement offered to Him by His Son on our behalf, then all else is lost. A partial atonement is no atonement at all, as far as it's effecting our justification. If even a minuscule part of it rests on us, to either initiate or complete, then everything in the final analysis comes right back to the ability of man to fulfill that vital part, as minuscule as we think it might be, in our own redemption.

It is God the Father whose fierce anger over man's sin, and the wrath that it rightly deserves, that must be wholly reconciled to His own satisfaction. In His eyes alone does our eternal fate reside. Is He 100 percent satisfied, or does he require more? For this task, only His own perfect and sinless beloved Son will suffice. We have absolutely nothing of any value whatsoever to contribute to this exchange. Either Jesus did it all, or it cannot possibly be done at all.

The critical issue at hand isn't about the situations of our earthly lives, or our health, or our prosperity, or even our happiness. It's whether or not God has been 100 percent reconciled in His own mind as to our debt of wrath for our sins against Him. For every human being, this is the singular issue of life that matters beyond this earthly lifetime. Has God been fully and completely reconciled in His mind over my sins? There are important matters of life every day that we deal with, and these have the ability to affect how we live and the conditions of life on this earth, but that's the extent of their importance. Yes, these things surely seem important now, but now isn't eternal. In the eternal, there is but one question of any significance. Has God's wrath been reconciled for my sins? The answer will surely affect the conditions of our existence for all the rest of eternity. And the question must be resolved here in this lifetime. It can't be changed later, no matter how much you wish, or beg, or argue, or plead, or cry. God has appointed both a time and a person for that reconciliation, and that time is our lifetime here on earth, and that person is His only Son, Jesus.

God has nothing He needs to prove to us. He has no need to justify His actions or His motives. He answers to no one and He is bound by no external restraints. He does exactly as He pleases and makes no apology for doing so. He is the potter in the metaphor of Romans 9 and He makes whatsoever He pleases from the clay that's rightfully His.

Some things He chooses to reveal, and some things He chooses to conceal, and all at His own pleasure. He planned the whole of creation, including time, and energy, and matter, and all living things, before He ever created them, and He has predestined the outcome of all of them by His own sovereign authority. He is reconciled in His own mind for some, and not for others, by His own determination alone, and all time and actions will providentially work out as they were planned to immutably produce those intended results.

We often try to second guess God. We imagine in our minds, if God has predestined our fate then what do we have to do about it? I admit this is a logical question, but God has so designed His creatures that we are either willing participants or not. When we choose to believe Jesus and follow Him in repentance and faith, God demands the credit and the glory for that because He alone has provided the faith that makes it happen, and then we make judicious use of that faith by our own willing participation, but only after the fact.

And conversely, when one chooses not to believe Jesus and follow Him in repentance and faith, that one is held responsible for making that choice of his own uncoerced will. You might say, well that somehow seems unfair. Okay, if that's the way you feel then you may freely register your objection to God's apparently arbitrary exercise of His sovereign authority at the Great White Throne. But in the end, it's His creation, and He makes the rules. He not only has the authority, but He also freely exercises that authority to suit His interests. This brings us to the second part of this verse:

Verse 20b:

having made peace through the blood of His cross;

The reconciliation of God in His own mind, that meets His own demands of justice, that we've just discussed was part of the predetermined plan of God. For God to be satisfied in His own mind for the damage and pollution that sin would bring into His creation, He determined that nothing less than His own blood, in the person of His Son, would suffice for atoning reconciliation. We can see that any suggestion that this is insufficient is an extreme affront to God Himself. It is to suggest that He isn't good enough Himself to be our substitute atonement. To reject His offer of Himself, and then dare to substitute something else is self destructive lunacy.

Now one might rightly ask, then why did God introduce sin into His creation? No one made Him put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil into the garden, under the very noses of Adam and Eve. Was this a colossal foul up on God's part, for which He has been trying to make corrections for six thousand years? Some seem to speak and behave as if this were the case. But I assure you that this tree was put there by the predetermination of God to serve a specific and fully intended purpose.

Since God is under no obligations, nor influenced by any outside forces, then we can be certain that He put that tree in the garden so that His creatures would learn something that they didn't first understand. God intended His creatures, that He specifically made in His own image, and to be His eternal worshipers, and His Sons eternal mate, to understand the difference between good and evil, with all the immense and tragic ramifications and repercussions that this knowledge entails. For, so it was in His judgement, that His eternal family would have to know all this from first hand experience before they would be fully capable of comprehending the value of His righteousness and His holiness. It was necessary in God's sight for His elect to have to see and suffer the consequences of sin themselves, for them to be able to eternally hunger and thirst for perfect righteousness, and be able to truly appreciate and worship Him for His.

All things ever created work out in the long run for the good of those who love God, by the knowledge that they bring to those who experience them. How incredibly shallow are those who evaluate God's love by these temporary situations that He has ordained for our eventual and eternal good. What kind of Father would willingly have his own son die on a brutal cross for something he didn't even do? If the blood of His cross (v.20) teaches us anything, then it teaches us that God's love must be evaluated by the final outcome of our lives, and never by the individual situations themselves.

When He is finished with us. When we have seen the good and seen the evil. When we have tasted the joy of doing good to others, and experienced the pain of evil, both to us and by us, then we will have been made ready to take our place by His side, as His bride and companion, with whom He will eternally rule, and even share His own glory forever and ever.

God brought the knowledge of good and evil into creation fully knowing what it would do to His people and His whole creation. And before He ever created anything, He planned the damage and he planned the reconciliation for that damage, because it served His purpose to do things this way. I can't remember how many times I've heard preachers say that God planned for good but the nasty old devil came in and spoiled God's plan. This is the theology of children and unbelievers, who have not one wit of comprehension of the sovereign omnipotence of the true and living God. Absolutely nothing happens apart from God's will and intention. The creation of man, the fall of man, and the reconciliation of man and the ultimate glorification of man is all firmly and irrevocably set in the eternal plan of God, and none can thwart or change it.

And still, God has freely chosen to bring about all His plan through the use of various means. He spoke the universe into being, but He saves the lost by the preaching of the gospel. He could just speak salvation into His elect, but He has chosen instead to make us active participants in the implementation of His plan. While He certainly can do whatever He wants without us, He has nonetheless chosen to put us right directly into the midst of the action. And it's for this reason that none can simply sit on their hands and expect God to do everything for us. (Let go and let God fallacy)

If we want a crop then we must plant the seeds, and then He will make them grow. If we seek righteousness and holiness of life, then we must make the daily choice to pursue them, and, if we do, then like the seeds that grow in time into a crop, He will bring righteousness to our lives by the power that He has to conform all things to Himself (Phi 3:21)

God has determined that the blood shed by His beloved Son, is wholly and completely sufficient for full and eternal reconciliation for the sins that will have to be committed in this creation by His providential determination. The ultimate eternal benefit that would be gained in the education of His children, was considered worth the price of His own blood, in the final analysis of the creation plan of God. And thus He preplanned and has brought about all that has and is still unfolding. He has preplanned the year, the month, the day, and the very hour and moment that His Son will return to this earth and commence His eternal rule. But, as we mentioned earlier, the timing of this is one of those things that He's chosen by His own sovereign will not to reveal to us just yet. And finally

Verse 20c:

through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Through Him is through Jesus. God's use of means is implemented here in that it's through His Son, Jesus, that He implements this reconciliation of His righteous requirements for wrath against sin. And not just one particular sin but for sin in its entirety, as the sentence makes clear. This reconciliation is for things on earth and things in heaven. We understand the things on earth, but what are the things in heaven? Simply, it doesn't say. We can speculate to our hearts content, but in the end that's all it'll be, speculation. We aren't given specifics because this verse isn't about specifics. This verse is about the totality of the reconciliation. There is the heavens, and there is the earth, and everything that exists in either is covered by this reconciliation of the blood of Jesus. Do we really need to list them specifically if we're told that all offenses are herein covered. And that's the sense in which this verse must be taken.

Every possible and conceivable offense in the mind and heart of God by those who are His elect, has been reconciled to Him by the blood of his Son, and that settles the issue. Any further discussion of individual specifics is pointless. Through Him, that's Jesus, God the Father has made reconciliation for His elect, to the satisfaction of His own self determined need for righteous wrath to be executed on their sins. It is God who has been offended by sin, and thus it is God who must be satisfied for reconciliation. And for those who accept His Son, He declares that He is satisfied.

As for the rest, they will all bear for themselves the same horrific and brutal, but yet just and righteous consequences of their own sins; those that are not among the ones who have repented and believed in Jesus Christ as their substitute. Both for their sins committed, and for their lack of perfect righteousness that's required in the sight of God the Father.

For those who are in Christ Jesus, all debts are paid, and, all necessary requirements are fulfilled, to join Him in His eternal kingdom of holy righteousness. To Him be the glory forever, Amen.

Conclusion:

From these six verses in Colossians, we get a magnificent picture of the person and position of Jesus in the eyes of God the Father. We see that God is very well pleased with His Son, and has placed all His fullness of character, and holiness, and righteousness in Him. He has placed Him above all powers and authorities ever created, and has put everything that exists under His rule and authority.

He has asked Him to earn that position by doing what no one else who ever lived could do. First, to live a perfect sinless life on the earth, inside a human body, which He did. Then, to be falsely accused of crimes He didn't commit, and be brutally and shamefully crucified in the place of others who did do those crimes and rightfully deserved that punishment. Which He did. Then to actually die on that cross and rise again to life, by the trust in the power of resurrection that His Father has given Him. Which He did.

He was thoroughly tested and found to be true, and perfect, and holy. It is this Jesus, who is the embodiment of God the Father, who we will see and touch in the eternal kingdom of God. The invisible and intangible Spirit Father is in Him, and He is in the Father. Later on in Colossians we'll be told that there's a mystery that's been hidden from past ages but has now been revealed to His elect saints, and that mystery is, "Christ in us, the hope of glory."

Jesus, the Messiah, is absolutely everything in the plan of God, and in the heart of God. The Father loves His Son with a love that can't be grasped by mortal beings. Those who believe they can find a way into heaven by some other means have no idea of the magnitude of their folly, or the degree of their offense to God. They will offer endless works of perceived kindness toward mankind, and some large sums of money and time and effort; but to reject this Jesus, whom God the Father loves above all else, is to reject God Himself. He who has the Son, has the Father, and conversely, whoever has not the Son cannot have the Father either. (1Jn 2:23)

The Father loves the Son and has taught Him all things about Himself, so that He would be His own image and representation to His creation. For all things were made by Him and for Him, and He is forever before all things. Our only hope of glory is to be eternally found in Him. What a wonderful and glorious mystery indeed!

Amen.

Robert Andrews
Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
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