God is the Great Reconciler
Colossians 1:19-21

I don’t have to prove to you that our American culture is in a cycle of incredible animosity. Many groups are against many groups – civil discussions are rare – echo chambers are sought out (that is where one makes all their contacts people who agree with them). The hate being poured out in words on the Internet is incredible – and it is about everything and everybody! That’s not our topic today, but it does help us understand the overwhelming greatness of a key attribute of God – God is the Great reconciler!

All the division in our country isn’t going to suddenly just go away. Estranged couples don’t suddenly wake up one day and both decide, “No problem.” Previous friends who are no longer talking with each other, don’t just simultaneously call each other to go do something fun together if it was anything major. And family members who haven’t communicated in years, don’t simply connect closely because they happen to be at a family gathering together.

Reconciliation is needed when a relationship breaks in a major way. But reconciliation is not easy and it seems particularly difficult in a culture where everyone is seeking their rights first and foremost as our culture promotes.

- In reconciliation, you have to deal with the injustice.
- You have to deal with the break of trust if you helped them before
- You don’t know if they see the error of their ways or will they just do it again
- Your desire for justice is strong, especially when the wrong is deep against you.

Reconciliation doesn’t just happen. Either one of the estranged takes a first step or an outside mediator tries to connect the two people. The one taking that step is often rebuffed, mocked, ignored or slandered at first. Reconciliation doesn’t just happen – in fact there is no process, no magic words, or action that assures reconciliation will result. Reconciliation doesn’t just happen. It costs and takes sacrifice. Yet what would this world be like – what would our lives be like without reconciliation. What kind of life would we have if every time we disagreed with someone or they seemed to attack us, that we simply cut off all contact and moved on to other people? What would the world be like without reconcilers – peacemakers? Reconciliation may be costly and hard but it is worth the try because this is a broken world and there are a lot of relationships that can use mending.

If major injustice or harm is involved, lasting reconciliation can’t happen without true repentance. Do you believe God WANTS to forgive you, that God wants reconciliation with you and that God wants to adopt you – not for what you do or produce, but simply because God is a God of love! God loves the whole world so much that He sent His one and only Son to die on the cross to pay for our sins so that anyone who gives their life in faith to Jesus as Savior and Lord shall not perish but have everlasting life. We will be changed or we didn’t really repent.

PROPOSITION: God is pleased to offer reconciliation to us that costs Him much even though we have grievously sinned, been His enemy and alienated ourselves to Him.
I. God is pleased to provide a way for reconciliation

Neal, you just mentioned the word “pleased” but I don’t see that word in either v 20 or 21 of Colossians 1? That’s because we are picking up mid-thought & mid-sentence! V 19 starts out “For God was pleased” then lists two things God is pleased with. Last week we tackled the first one. This week we see the second. For God is also pleased to offer reconciliation through Jesus – specifically Jesus’ blood shed as a sacrifice on the cross. And God takes steps to offer us reconciliation while we were yet His enemies. READ v 19-21.

Not only does God offer a way to heaven and eternal life for all those who can’t earn it or deserve it (which by the way, is all of us since every human falls short of holiness and perfection needed for heaven) but God is PLEASED to do it. God takes pleasure in bringing the gospel into our lives and opening our hardened or deceived hearts so we can understand the Good News of Jesus. Whether we are cranky, greedy, obnoxious, stubborn, dishonest, selfish, arrogant, disobedient, wimpy, scared, one who ignores God or just treats Him like a servant – God is pleased to reach into our undeserving lives and offer salvation through Jesus. Even all the sacrifice of the Son of God lowering Himself & emptying/constraining His divine attributes to become a human was not done reluctantly. God’s offer of everlasting life, heaven and transformation by faith alone in Jesus is not made reluctantly. God is pleased to offer reconciliation. God is the Great Reconciler. No matter how much you or I humanly investigated, struggled, or sought out God before we came to faith in Jesus alone, God did far more before we even started seeking Him! To reconcile is to restore a relationship to harmony.

A. This includes everything in heaven and on earth

READ v 19a & 20. The purpose of Christ’s death on the cross was not just to offer us a chance for heaven when we had none, but to reconcile all things to Himself whether things on earth or things in heaven. In v 16, we saw that Jesus was behind the creation of all things in heaven and earth – that is in the visible world we live in and also in the invisible spiritual world around us. All this was created by the eternal Son of God and also for Him. But sin has broken that originally harmonious relationship. The spirit world around us suffered a fall when Lucifer and a number of the angels rebelled. The human world suffered a great divide with God when Adam & Eve gave into the temptation & deception of satan and willfully disobeyed God’s only requirement at the time. And the physical world around us had a curse put on it as a result of the fall of Adam & Eve. Each has been alienated and stands in need of correction. These breaks explain the natural disasters & difficulties in the world around us, the moral dilemma of our broken human condition and the spiritual battles between angels & demons. Sin affects every area of creation, not just our human nature, our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. Jesus’ death on the cross and bodily resurrection from the dead not only provides a way for us to be reconciled to God, but it also provides the foundation for the release of the created world from the curse of sin. No more survival of the fittest or might makes right. And the restoration of righteousness, justice and peace will come with the sentencing of satan & the demonic who are unwilling to accept God’s terms for reconciliation.
B. God takes the first step in this reconciliation

**READ v 20.** In this case, it is God who is faultless and it is we who need to be reconciled to God. Our “reconciliation” refers to the restoration of fellowship between God and sinners. Reconciliation usually involves two prerequisites: Both parties must have a willingness to be reconciled, and there must be an occasion that brings them together. **In simple terms, someone needs to make the first step and both need to agree.** God clearly takes the first step. God the Father sent Jesus the Son as the reconciler and the Holy Spirit is now working in peoples’ lives to produce the willingness and openness to repent & believe. We are the ones who have done wrong, so we aren’t in a position to negotiate, pick which pieces we want or insist that God must do things our way – although that is what people, religions and spiritual claims opposite of God’s revealed truth actually do. “I don’t think God should do that! It doesn’t matter what the Bible said or Jesus demonstrated by His teachings, miracles or bodily resurrection from the dead!” God is the Great Reconciler – He has taken the first step to bring us back into harmony and fellowship with Him.

C. God personally sacrifices for this reconciliation

Anyone here who has sought to be a reconciler or been the one who took the first step when great wrongs have been done, know what a great sacrifice that often requires. For God, it meant the second person of the Trinity coming to earth to unfairly be put to death on a cross. **READ v 20.** God not only initiates reconciliation, but God personally sacrifices for that reconciliation. Reconciliation is not something you can force – it is something you must sacrifice towards and wait for the response. As Dorothy Sayers put it, **“Whatever the answer to the problem of evil, this much is true: God took His own medicine.”** God suffered for us. Jesus’ painfully died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins even though He Himself was sinless. The cross is clear evidence of how far God’s love is willing to go to genuinely offer reconciliation. God is the Great Reconciler. All creation is touched by sin. The world is out of order and needs a correction. This was provided in Christ. The world as a whole remains unaware of the reconciliation achieved on the cross – of the fact that God will eventually remake the world and its power structures so that they reflect His glory instead of human arrogance or thoughts.

D. God’s peace is available to true believers

**READ v 20.** The peace achieved through the death of Jesus is an objective peace. It is the peace of relationships, rather than feelings of the moment. Although the human heart cries for feelings of peace, the deeper need is for a **relationship of peace.** When relationships are correct, feelings follow – and indeed the Holy Spirit is regularly bringing an inner peace into our lives as a natural result of His work in our lives. Peace brings **order and harmony** into what is otherwise chaotic and distorted. By responding to the gospel, the Colossians themselves have experienced this reconciliation. They can live in a still dangerous and hostile world in peace – because their relationship with God is solid. They didn’t need to fear the evil spiritual powers around them or the crumbling economy or the opposition they regularly faced for their
beliefs BECAUSE their relationship with God was real and right. Greater outward peace will come when Jesus returns bodily to this planet as He promised! Thus Jesus died not only to provide individuals with salvation but also to restore a harmony to the universe. God is the Great reconciler!

II. But we are enemies of God by thought and action
   That is fine for those who obey God, but we were enemies of God – by both thought and action! Sometimes I feel like God should give up on me. READ v 21.

A. We were alienated from God
   The word translated alienated means "estranged". These Colossian followers of Jesus were at one time outside the covering of God’s blessings. They were separated from God. Now they realize that they, most likely Gentiles, were estranged from God and they were separated from the spiritual blessings of God’s people. The gods that they worshiped were false gods, and their religious activities could not take care of their sin or guilt. “Alienated” was an unusually powerful word then which indicated a persistent and permanent condition. This continuous alienation from God expressed itself in a mind that was hostile to Him and ended up by doing that which God disapproved. This is the way all of us were without Christ at one time, but people don’t like to hear it. The estrangement, the alienation, the separation, the wrongness and the self-focusedness by us has broken our relationship with God and put up a barrier between God & us far greater than we can imagine. If we could really see the depth of our sin and rebellion, it would not make sense to pretend that God simply makes friends with us apart from the radical actions of the incarnation (the incredible sacrifice of God lowering Himself to become a man), the cross (Jesus willing going to a cruel death simply for us) and resurrection (breaking the power of death by going through it). We were alienated from God because of our thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and actions. We are totally the problem – not God. We are enemies of God by thought and action. So the idea that God would initiate reconciliation when we were the ones who did the wrong and we were the ones unwilling to totally own those wrongs is absolutely mind-boggling.

We will struggle with completely owning our sins and wrongs all our lives on this planet. So one of the effective temptations of the demonic is to encourage self-pity. By the way, that is something I personally struggle with so I was intrigued by the following words I read this week – these are my paraphrase. While the author seemed to apply this to all “self-pity”, I simply believe it applies to the majority of self-pity.

*When discouragement is left unchecked, it grows. Self-pity is discouragement on steroids. Self-pity chisels in stone what discouragement whispers.*

*It tells you there is no out. That this is the way it will always be. And it simultaneously tells you it’s all your fault and none of this is your fault. Paradoxically, we believe both.*
Self-pity is dangerous because it moves us to the sidelines. Living in a state of self-pity means you don’t need anyone to take you out of the game because you’ve taken yourself out. It’s an incredibly effective strategy and completely counter to the gospel – the good news of Jesus.

The final thing self-pity does is rob us of all joy. Satan can’t steal our salvation. But he can steal our joy. And he delights in doing it. Don’t let him. If you’re stuck in self-pity, though, how do you get out? Here’s what I’ve found helpful. Self-pity is basically confession without repentance and forgiveness.

Self-pity leaves us acknowledging that there’s a big problem, but not fully owning it (confession) and moving forward (claiming forgiveness). It’s acknowledging sin without claiming hope. The Gospel never leads to self-pity. It leads to transformation. So if you’re struggling with self-pity, you’re part way there. Just keep going. Get past confession and onto repentance & forgiveness.

B. We were enemies in our minds
We can’t truly repent if we don’t see and own up to all of our part in the problem. So God makes it clear to us what we all partially acknowledged when we first came to faith in Jesus or when we turned back to Him. READ v 21. We were enemies of God in our mind. Our thinking as humans actually sees God and His ways as trying to hurt us (not help us), trying to defeat us (not transform us) or trying to keep us from pleasure (not bring us joy). Again, the word “enemy” is a strong word because it is not just someone who disagrees with you, but it is someone who is actively hostile to you. Our thinking was actively hostile to God! While some will say, this is exactly what I thought before I turned to commit my life to Jesus, more here will probably say, “But I don’t feel like I was an enemy of God in my mind. I didn’t know about the good news of Jesus, but I didn’t hate God. In fact, I’ve always believed that there was a God. I didn’t attack Him in my thoughts.” That’s because we can’t see the fullness, depth and devastation of our own thoughts and attitudes – we deceive ourselves that we are just trying to do this good and that when many times we just want what is easiest for us at the moment.

C. We are all full of evil behavior
The opposition to God & His ways in our minds is directly related to what we have done wrong in God’s sight. We become enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. People choose their actions first and then come up with their excuses after. If you go around life trying to just act on people’s excuses (why they say they do something), you are not going to see much positive change in their actions. We deceive ourselves. While it is wise to let people’s actions prove or disprove their claims, it is even more important for us to challenge our own rationalizations. “That really wasn’t a lie,” or “Yes I lied, but it didn’t hurt anyone.” How do we know it didn’t hurt anyone, we aren’t God? What was really true is that we lied (or shaded the truth) because we thought WE would gain something from it – either a person
wouldn’t be mad about what we really think or they wouldn’t think more negatively of us or they would see us in a better light! Our wrong actions in God’s sight simply reveal our thoughts and heart inside.

D. God still pleased to offer a way of reconciliation

The condition of our thoughts and actions is bad – really bad – so bad they make us enemies of God. Yet God was pleased to offer a way of reconciliation to us. PLEASED! If we see ourselves accurately, we should be far removed from God’s blessings, God’s favor and a genuine personal relationship with God. The possibility of reconciliation is remote at best. YET …

- God not only took the initiative for reconciliation, He did that willingly!
- God not only makes a way for us to be friends with Him, but He sacrificed greatly to make that happen.
- The relationship God offers to us isn’t just some left-overs or photo-op. God’s blessings in our lives aren’t just merit based – they are from His love.
- God’s protection isn’t skimpy because we aren’t perfect – He is always with us.

Now, God doesn’t say this so we can do opposite of what He says and then claim, “God is fine with that because all my sins are forgiven.” Digging into the reality & depth of our sin is not so we go into some kind of self-pity or woe is me. It is the truth and it helps us see the magnificence of Jesus more. Rightly seen our past sin encourages our current obedience, faith, hope and love.

If you follow Jesus, regularly challenge the idea that God doesn’t care about you or others around you.

- God could never forgive me for what I did – He is the One who initiates & sacrifices the most for reconciliation, why are we claiming to know what He will do.
- God doesn’t care about me because things are going bad in my life – He is the One who enters into our pain to provide for a painless eternity
- I can’t ever do anything right – God already factored that in to anything He calls us to do – He will provide.
- I don’t want anything to do with God because ... (you fill in what you wanted but didn’t get). Actually God has sacrificed more, offered us more, blessed us more and watched over us more than we will ever know until He reveals what really was happening all around us in heaven.

God is the great reconciler! Live each day with this wonderful truth and it will set you free in more ways than you can imagine. Keep overcoming in the power of Jesus!