

Christ-Centered Reconciliation, Racial and Relational **Colossians 1:18-23**

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, June 28, 2020

In the year 1918 an epidemic swept across the nation and other nations. In 2020 a virus claims a half million deaths worldwide, but put in perspective, the 1918 virus killed 50 million. Masks became mandatory in big cities of California and on the East Coast churches were shut down for weeks. When indoor gatherings were restricted, many churches like in D.C. met outdoors.

In 1918 here's what one pastor in our capitol preached after the quarantine:

‘There has been considerable grumbling, I know, on the part of some, particularly in regard to the closing of the churches. It seems to me, however, in a matter like this it is always wise to submit to such restrictions ...If avoiding crowds lessens the danger of being infected, it was wise to take the precaution and not needlessly run in danger, and expect God to protect us. And so, anxious as I have been to resume work, I have waited patiently until the order was lifted. I started to worry at first, as it seemed to upset all of our plans...but I soon recovered my composure. I said...God knows what He is doing. His work is not going to suffer. It will rather be a help to it in the end. Out of it, I believe, great good is coming. All the churches...are going to be the stronger and better for this season of distress

...The fact that for several weeks we have been shut out from [church] privileges...has brought home to us as never before what the church has really meant to us. We hadn't thought, perhaps, very much of the privilege while it lasted, but the moment it was taken away we saw at once how much it meant to us... I hope that now that [churches] are opened again, that we will all show our appreciation of their value by attending regularly upon their services... It is a great mistake for anyone to stand aloof from the Christian church. Everybody in the community ought to have a church home, and ought to be found in that church home...

Another thing that has impressed me in connection with this epidemic is how completely it has shattered the theory...that a white skin entitles its possessor to better treatment than one who possesses a dark skin ...stupid color prejudice...awful race prejudice...out of which so much that is evil has come, so much suffering, so much heart-burnings to those who are the victims of it, but which is regarded so lightly by the white man... [it's]against the great law of love...of Justice...though not without protest... [in this crisis] of what avail is the color of a man's skin, or his race identity?

There is only one other thought that has come to me in connection with this epidemic; it is of the blessedness of...security which a true, living, working faith in the Lord Jesus Christ gives one in the midst of life's perils ...a firm grip upon Jesus Christ...this epidemic will be lost if it fails to have that effect upon us, if it does not lead to careful heart-searching on our part.¹

With that in mind let's turn to Col 1 and turn it back even farther in history.

Going back 102 years or 2000 years to Col 1, nothing's new under the sun. It's striking to see the similarities of where our country was at in 1918 and the grumbling against restrictions, church being previously taken for granted and the danger of staying away from it. The note of protest and justice about how evil and awful racism is also struck me, and that white pastor's concern for the suffering and heart-burning on those who suffer it and how little that tends to be regarded by us who haven't felt that. We can think lightly about prejudice or make light of it and not try to have compassion on the alienated who've turned angry in inner cities, our mind can't fathom hostility we see.

But look at v. 21, we're no better spiritually in heart and mind:

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² 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, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel...

Let me pause, the context is Paul writing the 1st century church in Colossae. But this is a timely word for us for our time in God's word in the next text as we study through Colossians verse-by-verse. Media or social media will continue fighting, we need to continue in the faith. We don't put our hope in the government – at least I hope you don't – if you have, those hopes have been dashed – but God's Word says here our hope is in the gospel. We can't move on from the good news to put our hope in movements based on what's on the news. There are movements taking the world by storm that can move people away from hope in the gospel. For example, there's *scriptural* justice but there's also secular *social* justice as a movement that actually can shift focus from or move away from gospel hope. Liberals replace the *scriptural gospel* with a *social gospel*. There's a lot unstable or shifting in our culture, but we need to be stable, steadfast, and sensitive to those needing the gospel

Racial reconciliation is all over the media and social, but we need to think and speak biblically about reconciliation. Reconciliation is a biblical word, and it speaks to our political world. Responses to the tragic death of George Floyd have divided many, but if you look at v. 22 there's a death of another that reconciles many: *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death*

... That's Jesus for people in v. 21 who were once alienated from each other and hostile, doing evil to each other. His death reconciles man to man and man to God, look at v.20: *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

We need peace officers to keep the peace, but only Jesus can make peace by His blood shed on the cross. And His followers are called to be peacemakers by the same gospel message. People have strong feelings on what's going on in our world, not just on racial issues, but on rights they feel a governor can't deny, or the rightness of laws, or just the right way to relate with those who differ.

But the power of the cross is stronger than all of that in a church. It's strong enough to make white supremacy bow to Christ's supremacy. It can transform one who used to hate white people (a sister in Christ I know). Pride and prejudice comes from all sides, but the gospel changes us inside.

This topic has been before us all month, the news and national conversation. In God's providence, reconciliation is the next subject going thru this book. As we preach through the Word it addresses our world. It applies to all time. This topical study is very relevant and important to think God's thoughts.

This will be part 1 and start of a NT conversation on reconciliation, racially and relationally, starting with our relationship with God->Christians->world

Outline: 1. Christ's Reconciliation 2. Our Application

The context of reconciliation has to start with Christ and His gospel work. This is Christ-centered reconciliation. This is all about Him in v. 14-20, 14x He's referred to in just a few verses. ¹⁸ *And **he** is the head of the body, the church. **He** is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything **he** might be preeminent.* ¹⁹ *For **in him** all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,* ²⁰ *and **through him** to reconcile **to himself** all things...*

The context isn't universal salvation but there will be a reconciliation of all things in the world. This is much bigger than America or ancient Colossae Paul's writing to, this is the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth. I take this as after final judgment cleanses earth when paradise is restored. In the end times, after sin and sinners are removed from this world, it will be at peace, reconciled in the sense of restored to the original harmony of creation

We sing at Christmas: 'Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinner reconciled.'
But also 'No more let sin or sorrow reign, nor thorns infest the ground
[this is His 2nd coming] to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found.'²

In Rom 8, creation groans and '*waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God... the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*'¹³

That's the final redemption of our resurrection bodies, a kingdom of peace. That's the end of Revelation, chapter 20 mentions a thousand year reign and lake of fire judgment, then chapter 21-22 a renewed earth where water, trees and everything is brought back to something like the Garden of Eden. Isaiah seems to describe even enemy creatures reconciled; wolf, lamb, lion and kid.

The curse will be reversed, and there will be a purged universe

This is part of John's vision of heaven in Revelation, around the throne, worshippers *'sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation..." (5:9)*⁴

That's what Col 1:20 is talking about and looking forward to, the blood of Christ bringing reconciled and redeemed from all people groups together. This is His multi-ethnic family in unity in glory, former enemies of each other now singing in harmony. He's the beginning, the first born from the dead, the preeminent Lion of the tribe of Judah is also the worthy lamb slain

We pray 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' We pray the church looks more like heaven. Whatever ethnicities are in a community worship in unity to give Christ glory. That's been God's plan since Gen 12, all the families of the earth blessed together with His people.

The apostle John grew up in an era of slavery, Jew-Gentile animosity, and even fellow Jews looked down on Galileans like him and their accent. John was a racist toward Samaritans asking Jesus to call down fire on them. The Jews who wanted to insult Jesus called Him a Samaritan. But Jesus in John 4 brings the gospel to a Samaritan woman(!) and revealed His identity to her and her village saw Him first as Savior of the world. Grace changed John to be an apostle of love who in Acts 8 brought the love of Christ to Samaria.

John the former Samaritan-hater was changed by the Savior and saw the future in Rev 7: *'I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"'*⁵

How could he tell it was every nation by looking? Apparently their colors and cultures will be evident eternally, a diversity of ethnicities worshipping in unity for all eternity. Rev 21 says nations will bring God honor and glory.

That's the big picture of His big family plan to reconcile all His redeemed. We should long to see that more on earth and make disciples of all nations.

And when this text talks about reconciling all or Rom 11 or 2 Cor 5 talks about 'reconciling the world,' that's the idea, reconciling all *who believe*, all *nations and tongues* 'from every kindred, every tribe on this terrestrial ball.'

But all who reject Christ will be banished from that world to come

The word *reconcile* means to bring together former enemies to be at peace. It's not just a ceasefire, it's foes becoming friends. It's removing the enmity or hostility so there's unity and harmony as God intended in the beginning.

We have to start in the beginning like v. 19 says, Jesus is the beginning. His preeminence is over everything. So in this context, reconciliation isn't just about *people* being saved, *all things* are to be made right. That includes all things on earth that aren't right; sinners, systems, institutions, injustice, etc. But we need to be careful with our culture's terms, we need Christ's truth. Our world can change laws, Jesus changes hearts and will change the world

Eph 1 says God has a '*plan...to unite all things in him*', it's '*when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ ...*'⁶ [sounds like Col 1:18-19]

When v. 20 talks about reconciling all things through Christ making peace through His blood on the cross, Eph 2 applies that to all things that might divide ethnic groups. What Col 1:20 says Paul expands in Eph 2: '*you were far away from God, but now you have been **brought near to him through the blood of Christ**. For Christ himself brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own **body on the cross**, he broke down the wall of **hostility** that separated us...He **made peace between** Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ **reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross**, and our hostility toward each other was put to death ...no longer strangers and foreigners...You are members of God's family.*'⁷

That's the broader context of how the same writer uses those terms in Col 1:20-22. Gospel reconciliation brings peace with God and with His family. It unites across skin or ethnic differences, across social or economic lines. Turn to Col 3 and we need to see they had seen this in their local church.

Col 3:11 *Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised [Gentile], barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.* These were very segregated people groups. Jews wouldn't enter the house of non-Jews and if walking through their land, shook dust off sandals after.

The Greeks saw themselves as superior (Big Fat Greek Wedding captures a bit of that). In Bible times Jews hated Greeks and Gentiles. Uncircumcised was an insult (David said of Goliath *who is this uncircumcised Philistine?*). Barbarian was no compliment either, some considered them a lesser race. One writer I read said the word Caucasian comes from barbarian Scythian lands. These were looked down by others in the Middle East, uneducated.

Greeks looked down on barbarians, barbarians looked down on Scythians. Josephus, a Jewish writer said Scythians were 'little better than wild beasts.'

Slaves were a big part of Roman Empire, 30% of population. Aristotle had said before NT time that slaves were basically 'living tools.' To some their lives didn't matter but Christianity changed slave-master relations. There were slaves in this church (letter of Philemon says treat as beloved brother).

Gal 3:28 says in Christ *'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free...you are all one in Christ...'* (context is clearly all believers).

It was unthinkable these groups could be in unity, but Jesus reconciled these to God and to each other, breaking down all racial, social, cultural divisions. If He could do that with them, and He did, He can reconcile Americans, too!

That's the hope and healing we can offer to a hurting world

That takes us from Christ's Reconciliation to Our Application

There's nothing new since Bible times, Christ's good news is still the need

Our focus needs to be Christ and His gospel. We need to live it and give it.

Only Christ could bring these groups together by His gospel reconciliation.

And that's what He did in this church, bringing all these together. Racism isn't solved by politics or police-defunding, it takes the power of the gospel.

Listen to Rom 1:14 *'both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish... I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.'*

Are you eager to share it in these times or ashamed or afraid of man?

There's a lot swirling in our culture and spreading in our country that takes away from the gospel. Our world is talking about institutional sin while the gospel is focused on individuals and how their sin can be forgiven by Jesus through repentance and faith. The gospel changes the hearts of individuals, which then can affect any institutional problem. Systemic injustice is all the rage now literally, but the gospel solves a sinner's injustice if he confesses it to God. God doesn't forgive systems, He forgives sinners. Some movements are calling for reparations based on white skin instead of repentance for sin. But the reconciliation Colossians is talking about isn't restitution to people for what your ancestors did to theirs, it's repentance for sins that you did.

Let's bring it closer to home. You may not have tensions with groups like v. 11, but how are you doing interpersonally with v. 13, bear with one another and if you have a complaint, forgive as God forgave you? The reconciliation Col 1 talks about is also something our Lord gave application to in worship in Matthew 5:22: if you're at worship and know you and your brother are divided, go, seek to be reconciled to your brother (communion next week)

The world is polarizing and politicizing, the gospel has power to reconcile. Social media isn't a place for reconciliation, talking face to face with real people is what I would exhort

you to do (not just cultural issues, personal). Let's not battle online, let's be loving witnesses for the gospel in person.

There are big things happening in our culture to be aware and in prayer for. Jesus is more concerned about injustice and racism than anyone. It matters to Him deeply when lives are taken, whether a person was a criminal or not, all human life is made in God's image and has inherent sanctity and dignity. Life is precious, unarmed men or unborn babies killed is grievous to Jesus.

Friday night at YAG we had a discussion on counter-cultural racial issues. I recorded it and put those notes on church blog. Part of it is an article by Shai Linne written to help white friends understand his story and struggle and his gospel hope. The blog also links to audio from Voddie Baucham, a black pastor about Black Lives Matter and movements that undermine the gospel (also Al Mohler, John Piper). Go to gcb.church/blog⁸ to read or listen later.

As you think of world's divisions in v. 11, Jew/Greek, slave/free, listen to 1 Cor 12:13 '*we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink*' (NIV).

This takes us to **baptism** which is a picture of the gospel. Today we get to see and hear how God's grace changed an individual sinner who's repented and had his sins washed away by the blood of Christ. He's been reconciled to God, like Colossians 1 says, and our brother now wants Jesus to have first place in everything, to be preeminent in his life. If he's not #1 in your life, I would plead with you, be reconciled to God. Turn from your sin to Jesus as your only hope, trust Him alone to save you. And for us who believe in Him let's let this gospel picture in baptism remind us to live and give the gospel.

3:12 *Put on then, as God's chosen, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts*

That's the note I want to end on. We need compassion from Christ's heart. And with compassion for the hurting, You reached out Your hand...
 You saw behind the eyes of sorrow And shared in our tears,
 Heard the sigh of the weary ... [do we seek to draw people near?]
 We stood beneath the cross of Calvary And gazed on Your face
 At the thorns of oppression And the wounds of disgrace...
 How beautiful the feet that carry This gospel of peace
 To the fields of injustice And the valleys of need—
 To be a voice of hope and healing ...
 May that be us, may we show to the world Christ's compassion, amen?

LET'S PRAY

Help us look beyond pre-conceived ideas or politics to the people impacted, listen to and learn from our black brethren who hurt, and may love overcome hate.

[The gospel says] "*we ourselves were once ... hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...*" - Titus 3:3-5. God help us to ultimately lead people or conversations to Christ... Help us remember the ultimate injustice of the cross brings ultimate mercy to any shade of skin or ethnicity, sin or enmity, as Jesus can redeem and reconcile all. I pray specifically for any divisions in this body relationally to begin healing this week. In His name⁹

¹ <https://www.9marks.org/article/some-reflections-growing-out-of-the-recent-epidemic-of-influenza-that-afflicted-our-city/>

² Charles Wesley, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," and "Joy to the World."

³ Romans 8:20-22 NIV.

⁴ NKJV.

⁵ Revelation 7:9.

⁶ Ephesians 1:10, 22-23.

⁷ Ephesians 2:13-19 NLT.

⁸ <https://www.gcb.church/blog/post/a-conversation-on->

⁹ <https://www.gcb.church/blog/post/a-pastor-s-prayer-for-minneapolis>