

COSMIC RECONCILIATION

COSMIC REDEMPTION

Studies in Colossians

Study 9

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YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL

It was J. B. Phillips who wrote a small book entitled 'Your God is Too Small'. It is a cheerful title, and that statement may well apply to most of us, for most of our lives.

Colossians 1:19–20 For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

How superb! All things reconciled through Christ, to God. All things on earth and in heaven at peace, through the blood of the cross! Christ's Cosmic Victory is of such enormous dimensions, yet our own knowledge and perception and understanding of them is so . . . well, diminutive. Our responsiveness, is so affected by the small details of daily life, and by our self-absorption, worry, failures, guilt and sin, that we probably all fail to fully appreciate what the cross of Jesus Christ now means for the future of the creation, for the future of humanity—and for the joy we shall experience as we participate in the life of the Triune God—in the things that are yet to come.

1Corinthians 13:12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

SEEING THE FATHER'S GREAT WORK

It is the hope of glory, as yet dimly in view—yet seen with the eyes of faith—that evokes our love for the Father. Our Father! Paul says that it is the Father, 'who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light'. It is the Father, 'who has rescued us from the power of darkness'. It is the Father, 'who has transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son', Jesus the King! (See Colossians 1:12–13).

Having been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, we can now enjoy and praise and marvel in God's holy Presence, who took the initiative to send Jesus, in order to deal with sin and bring us home. Now that we are in a new kingdom, our guilt being removed, our sins dealt with through forgiveness from the cross, we can now say together with Jesus, and in his same words, '*I love the Father*' (John 14:23).

IN JESUS CHRIST WE HAVE REDEMPTION

It is in Jesus Christ, the Father's dear Son, 'in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins'. This man Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible

and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him' (See Colossians 1:14–16). Do we hear that?

. . . the Christian faith is necessarily missionary, because the word of the cross lodged in its heart is the word of an infinitely expanding redemption that must reach out to the uttermost bounds of the universe, embracing every tongue and tribe and people.¹

GOD OUR FATHER HAS RECONCILED ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST

He [Christ] himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:17–20).

The following few verses focus upon the change in status that we have as we stand before God now—'holy, blameless, irreproachable'. They tell of the change we know—or at least experience in part—in our lives, now, by faith:

21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him— 23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.

To be reconciled is to no longer be 'estranged, and hostile in mind'—or as we say, no longer bitter and twisted and angry. It is also to be positively relating to God.

In Colossians 1:19–22, Paul takes a Greek word *katallasso*, meaning 'to reconcile to God' (Romans 5:8–11), and he adds a prefix *apo* to emphasise that something is even stronger than that: *apokatallasso*. It suggests powerfully that reconciliation is not just the setting up of a relation of peace that never existed before, but the restoration of a relationship of peace and love that had been destroyed.²

Thus in the action described by *apokatallasso* there is the closest relation between redemption and creation on the one hand and the reaching out of reconciliation to all things, *ta panta*, on the other, to the eschatological *pleroma* or fullness. The whole universe comes under reconciliation, angels and all . . . Reconciliation described by *apokatallasso* carries with it the complete unity of all things in Christ in a vast cosmic peace.³

Simply noting these profound points that T. F. Torrance brings out, should help us:

1. Reconciliation is the pure act of God's love.
2. 'God loved us even when he hated us' (Calvin).
3. The self-giving God in love to humanity took our cause upon himself.
4. The fulfilment of covenant mercy is in gathering man in to the embrace of divine love: 'I will be your God and Father'.
5. Reconciliation is achieved and completed in the person of the incarnate Son.
6. 'Reconciliation begins with the birth of Jesus when God and man are brought into real union and it is that real union carried throughout the conditions of our

¹ T. F. Torrance, *The Atonement*, IVP/Paternoster, 2009, p. 200.

² T. F. Torrance, p. 144.

³ T. F. Torrance, p. 144.

- human life in its estrangement from God, in such a way as to restore our human life from its estrangement for fellowship with the Father. Thus the whole life and action of Christ from birth to death constitutes reconciliation.⁴
7. Reconciliation is the fulfilment of God's assumption of our humanity . . . the Son freely assumes our damnation and final judgment, freely assumes our God-forsakenness in the *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani* of death on the cross under judgment. And so he achieves our assumption into oneness with himself, and because that assumption is maintained even in the hell into which the Son descended, it achieves its end in the resurrection of man out of hell and the exaltation of man in Christ to the right hand of God . . . It is then *in the person of Jesus Christ himself, the mediator*, that our reconciliation has already taken place, and as such it remains as enduring and perfected reality available for all in him.⁵
 8. The reconciliation took place through a 'wondrous exchange' (as Calvin called it)⁶ in which Christ took our place, that we might have his place. That is what the term 'reconciliation' means, an act of reconciliation effected on the basis of exchange.
 9. Christ completely identified with us and intervened in our place.
 10. Christ is so one with God that what he did God did, and so one with us that what he did we did.
 11. Reconciliation in and through the Lord Jesus is the establishment of peace with God. It is the removal of all enmity between God and mankind, and the reinstating of humanity's personal relations with God in love and peace.
 12. Reconciliation between God and man issues in peace when the wrath of God is removed . . . The wrath can be removed only through the righteous infliction of the divine judgment against our sin. Or to use more juridical terms, the wrath of God is removed only when his righteous will has punished sin and judged it.
 13. The will of God's love is fully fulfilled and the objective obstacle is removed.
 14. **'Because of what Christ has done, God has nothing more to say to us in respect of our sin and guilt, for they are put away.'**
 15. **'Nothing now stands in between us and holy God righteously calling for his condemnation and judgment.'**
 16. 'God takes on himself his own rejection of humanity and directs to them only the positive act of acceptance.'⁷
 17. 'There is no positive act of rejection of any human being.'
 18. 'If anyone goes to hell they go hell, only because, inconceivably, they refuse the positive act of the divine acceptance of them, and refuse to acknowledge that God has taken their rejection of him upon himself, so acknowledging that they deserved to be rejected.'
 19. The very nature of the gospel is to bring salvation—'reprobation is accidental'.
 20. If therefore any person goes to hell, it is by the downright refusal of the perfected work of reconciliation in which God in Christ has already chosen them in pure love and removed enmity between God and man entirely.⁸

⁴ T. F. Torrance, p. 149.

⁵ T. F. Torrance, p. 150.

⁶ John Calvin's *Institutes*, 4.17.2.

⁷ T. F. Torrance, p. 156.

⁸ T. F. Torrance, p. 157.

21. Reconciliation is *objective* and *subjective*: Atonement must be worked into the mind and heart of man, defeating sin from within.
22. We can go on and speak of *Immanuel, God with us*.

At this point we shall depart from Torrance, and bring to mind the words of Jesus concerning the role and function of the gift of the Holy Spirit, bringing us into fellowship, reconciled to God, *subjectively* knowing what has been *objectively* done.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:7–11, RSV).

12 'I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you' (John 16:12–15).

Returning to Torrance, and his helpful theological points:

1. Reconciliation is Cosmic.⁹
2. The whole creation is involved in reconciliation—a cosmic peace.
3. 'Because God has become man in Christ, has for ever bound himself up in existence and life with his creation, the whole of creation is involved in reconciliation.'¹⁰
4. No change for the creation could be more momentous than that the creator himself should become a creature, should condescend to enter into it from within and share its created existence and so redeem it.
5. 'The New Testament envisages a *cosmic peace* as the effect of the reconciliation, for all things are involved, and Christ is made the head of all things and in him all things are gathered up being reconciled to God the creator through the cross . . . all things revolve around Christ and his cross—literally all things, visible and invisible, things animate and things inanimate, the whole creation, heaven and earth, are involved in this reconciliation. It is in that reconciled universe that we have our new being in Christ.'¹¹

FROM EDEN, TO THE NEW CREATION

As we share the gospel with other people, we do well to keep in mind that 'all things' noble, that others are interested in have been created by God—through Christ, for his glory and purpose. God has blessed creation with a task to be fruitful (Gen. 1:28) and to extend the borders of 'Eden' throughout the universe. This could only happen, through Jesus Christ, the new Adam without sin. His presence reverses the curse and brings blessing flowing anew to all things, all nations. If any person is, by faith, 'in Christ' they are part of the New Creation already. *They still bring forth fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green, to show that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him* (Psalm 92:14–15). Keep at it, folks, the future is grand in Christ, and the truth—amidst the battles is marching on.

⁹ The Milky Way = 1 Galaxy (100,000 million stars in a galaxy); And 10,000 million Galaxies total.

¹⁰ T. F. Torrance, p. 169.

¹¹ T. F. Torrance, p. 169.