

COLOSSIANS 1:20-23 | THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE CROSS

VERSE 20 - BLUE

This passage highlights the profound achievement of the cross. Specifically, it states that God "made peace" through the cross's blood.

The question that arises is, "with whom was peace made?" Within the context of this passage, the only suitable answer is "all things." These are the same entities held together in Him, as mentioned in verse 17. However, all things were subjected to a curse during the fall.

Genesis 3:17 describes the aftermath of Adam's disobedience when he ate from the forbidden tree despite God's command. This act led to a curse on all creation, particularly focusing on the "ground". The original Hebrew word for "ground" is "adamah," signifying not just the soil but the entire Earth. Hence, the curse was all-encompassing, impacting every facet of creation. For instance, consider Genesis 1:25 and 6:7, which both use the term "adamah" to describe the earth.

In the same vein, Romans 8:22 states, "...we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now." This scripture is clear that all creation, not just humanity, needs reconciliation with God. Therefore, the cross serves as a source of peace not only for humanity but for all created things.

But how did the blood of the cross accomplish this peace, this restoration of all things? It is important to recognize that death was the punishment for sin. Death came to all things, including humanity, animal life, plant life, and even molecular life, as exemplified by the second law of thermodynamics. So, in Christ, God accomplished a "once for all" death using the One in whom all fullness dwelt (v. 19). In this sense, the fullness of the punishment was accomplished in Christ's blood, and from that point on, life could be offered and judgment satisfied simultaneously. This is the profound accomplishment of the cross.

The aim of creating peace was "to reconcile all things unto Himself." It's crucial to clarify that "things" does not indicate their salvation. Instead, it refers to the reconciliation of the created order, which should not be mistaken for salvation. In the following verses, starting from the next one, Paul will discuss people, mirroring other notable reconciliation passages like 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. However, in this context, the focus is on "things."

VERSE 21 - BLUE

Verse 21 addresses the Colossians, and by extension, all of us, by revealing a time when our thoughts and actions alienated us from God, making us His enemies. Despite this alienation and enmity, God's infinite love and mercy led Him to reconcile us to Himself, underscoring the depth of His reconciliation. He even reconciled those whose own minds and behaviors had turned them against Him. This reconciliation is a testament to the all-encompassing peace God achieved through the cross, which extends to all creation.

It's crucial to understand that being 'enemies' of God is not humanity's original or inherent state. Genesis 1:31 shows that after creation, God deemed everything He had made 'very good,' indicating a state of harmony and goodness, not enmity. However, the Fall, as described in Genesis 3, drastically altered this relationship by introducing separation from God.

Moreover, individuals like the Colossians compounded this separation by embracing godless thinking and the ensuing wicked actions, becoming "alienated and enemies" of God. Paul clarifies in Romans 8:7 that "the carnal mind is enmity

against God." Yet, God has reconciled even those actively opposed to Him, demonstrating the vast scope of His reconciliation: not just all things and humanity, but even His enemies.

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#### VERSE 22 - BLUE

The reconciliation of the alienated and enemies was carried out "In the body of His flesh through death." This phrase emphasizes the necessity for the incarnation - God becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ - and underscores the reality of His physical death. This was not a spiritual or metaphorical death, but a physical one. It was in Christ's physical body, through His actual death, that reconciliation was accomplished.

The **PURPOSE** of this reconciliation was "to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight." It's important to clarify that this doesn't mean that God's sovereignty is dependent on the achievement of this goal in every person's life. God remains sovereign regardless of our choices and actions. However, the **POTENTIAL** for each person to achieve this state exists because of the reconciliation accomplished through Christ.

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#### VERSE 23 - BLUE

This presentation of being "holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight" will occur for those who "continue in the faith grounded and settled" and are "not moved away from the hope of the gospel." It suggests that the achievement of this state is contingent upon one's continued faith and unwavering hope in the gospel. If individuals do not continue in faith or are moved away from the hope of the gospel, Paul doesn't explicitly mention the outcome. However, the reasonable conclusion would be that they risk missing out on this presentation as holy, unblameable, and unproveable.

However, we must consider a few things: First, we are saved without works, which might cause us to boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 explicitly conveys this, stating "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Introducing works post-salvation could potentially give us something to boast about, which contradicts the essence of grace-centered salvation.

Second, we are complete in Christ. Colossians 2:10 reinforces this, stating "And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." If we are complete in Him, it is illogical to suggest that we are incomplete in our works of holiness. Our completion in Christ is not contingent upon our works but is a result of His work on the cross.

Third, if there are separate designations in eternity of the "holy" and the "saved but didn't make the holy category," it could potentially bring shame, comparison, or curiosity into eternity. This concept seems contrary to Revelation 21:4, which assures us that God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." If there were still reasons for shame or comparison, this promise would not hold true. As such, it's essential to understand that our status in eternity is not determined by our works but by our faith in the accomplished work of Christ on the cross.

So, how can we reconcile these concepts? It's undeniable that there is a "worthy walk" and an "unworthy walk" with the Lord, even for those who are completely under grace. A worthy walk would enable someone to present themselves before God as "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Timothy 2:15).

However, perhaps we've overemphasized the "presentation" as if it's a grand gathering of the saved happening at the inaugural session of the Body of Christ following the rapture. But couldn't this just be a reflection of God's heart, expressed through Paul, for believers? Rather than being a formal presentation of the holy, it could simply be God's desire for our lives.

As for the "presentation," it's possible that we have overemphasized its formality. The word "present" in Greek is *παρίστημι* [paristemi], which can mean to "stand nearby" (compare Acts 1:10). In this context, it could be seen as God's heart's desire to bring us near to Him, holy and blameless, not as a formal presentation but as a loving Father who takes delight in His children. In this sense, the focus shifts from a grand presentation to a relationship, from performance to identity.

Viewed in this way, God's heart (His desire) for our lives is vividly expressed. This perspective shifts the focus away from a formal presentation and towards our relationship with God and His desire for us to live a life worthy of His calling.

Paul's statement about the Gospel being preached "to every creature under heaven" speaks of the unprecedented success of the spread of the message of Grace. Whether Paul was speaking hyperbolically or literally, it is clear that the Pauline message had been greeted with warm appreciation and rapidly accepted around the world. Sadly, it would be rejected in its pure Pauline form shortly thereafter, and the resulting perversion of the Pauline message has been a source of theological error throughout Christian history.

Paul's notation of being "made a minister" of the Gospel is the first beginning of his discussion on the revelation of that Gospel, which shall be the subject of our next segment.