

Making Peace by the Cross

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[0 : 01] Let's turn this morning to the passage we read in Colossians, the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, and particularly words you'll find in verse 20.

Through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, and especially these words, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Making peace by the blood of his cross. One of the Beatitudes, as they're called in Matthew 5, with which the Sermon on the Mount begins, says, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

We are never more like God than when we are creating peace, or seeking to bring about peace, where the absence of peace may be found.

You come to be truly like God, because God is the God of peace. The God who created peace for us. And as this text tells us, who made peace by the blood of his cross, the cross of Christ.

[1 : 21] Colossians is a letter that sets out to establish and emphasize the superiority and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as our Savior.

The Colossians were facing false teaching in that part of the world and of the church of the time, where that superiority and sufficiency of Christ was being called into question.

There were a whole lot of alternatives presented to them, by which you could graduate to be accepted with God. There were other figures, even angelic figures, that were given prominence along with Christ, that were set out as supposed access to God.

Paul is having none of that at all. Paul went out to emphasize for the Colossians, the gospel that he preached that they knew of, was the gospel where Christ exclusively is the Savior of sinners.

Where Christ exclusively has everything we need. Where the cross of Christ exclusively, the blood of the cross, is what made peace with God.

[2 : 40] That's why the sufficiency and the superiority of Christ is united to the blood of the cross.

God has made peace by the blood of his cross. Now you can see the word reconcile in the verse as well. Through Jesus, through him, God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, making peace by the blood of the cross.

And that shows you that the idea of reconcile is the same thing as making peace. God reconciling all things to himself is the same as God making peace through the blood of the cross.

And before we look at that, we have to look at something else. Something that's implied in the text. Something that's expressly mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

And that is enmity. In order to make peace, or indeed the making of peace, is dealing with an enmity that has to be removed.

[3 : 52] That's the first point we want to look at. An enmity that needs to be removed. Secondly, we'll look at this death which removed that enmity.

Which removed it at God's initiative, by God's Son, and achieving God's peace. And thirdly, just to conclude, we'll look at that peace.

The peace that has been achieved by the blood of the cross, and how that is the peace that's extended to all of us through the gospel. Here's an enemy to remove.

Making peace by the blood of the cross. Why did Jesus have to die? Why was it necessary for this death to be experienced by the Son of God in our nature?

Why should such a person as the Son of God have had to go so far as to actually die the death of the cross? As he took our human nature to himself to that end for that purpose.

[4 : 55] But why was it necessary? What is at the back of that? What is the dark background to the cross? It is our rebellion against God. Our enmity against God, and consequently his hostility of enmity toward us.

What caused that? Where did that begin? Well, you can't understand the cross. You can't begin to understand the cross until you accept as fact the opening chapters of the Bible, and in particular the third chapter of Genesis, which talks about the fall of mankind, the sin and the rebellion of human beings against God, in our first parents Adam and Eve, and Adam as the one with whom God had made the covenant arrangement.

He was our representative. We could not have had a better representative. At that stage, your friends, he is God's perfect man.

And yet he rebelled, and we rebelled in him. And that rebellion, that enmity is what's behind the cross. The sin that caused that enmity is what God is dealing with in the blood of the cross, in the death of Christ.

Because the cross is not a nice spectacle. And we lose sight of the fact that the ugliness and the grotesqueness of sin lies behind what happened on the cross of Calvary.

[6 : 36] When you look at the cross described in Scripture, you don't find something that's nice to look at. We've polished up the cross as human beings. We've got things like jewelry made in the shape of the cross.

You add certain jewels to it. It can be gold or silver. It can be all sorts of things. But it's a nice polished product. It's something that you wear as an item of jewelry.

And anyway, other depictions of the cross. Even when you find sometimes paintings of the cross, you don't really find it standing out in all its ugliness, in all its horror, in all its blood-stained grotesqueness.

Don't imagine that Jesus on the cross was nice to look at. Don't imagine that the words of Jesus from the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Don't imagine that he said that in a calmness of voice, like something with a posh Edinburgh accent. The Bible tells you, he cried out, my God, my God.

[7 : 51] He screamed in agony. That's what the cross is. It's unfathomable pain.

It's pain being expressed by the one who's hanging there and experiencing that pain. And what is it that makes it so incredibly unnice and ugly and dark to look at?

What is all this suffering really caused by? By his taking our sin. And when you make sin a small and hardly significant thing, something that you can look at and then look quickly past, and that means your sin and my sin, our personal sin, our rebellion against God, your rebellion against God, and my rebellion against God.

When you make it something that's not really terribly serious, something that can be dealt with in a very kind of matter-of-fact way, what you're really doing is bringing the cross down to a size that just fits your own idea of it.

But if sin is what the Bible says it is, then it helps to explain why the cross is what it was. Why it was such a place of darkness and pain and agony for the Son of God.

[9 : 21] Because your sin deserved that. And that was God giving it what it deserved. And the consequences of that fall of man, that sin against God, is enmity.

Now, it's obvious that we have an enmity against God. It says that in the next verse. You who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death.

Making peace certainly does include the enmity that you and I have in our hearts toward God. And, it's very obvious that you and I have an enmity in our heart towards God.

All you've got to do is look in on yourself when Jesus Christ addresses you through the Gospel and says, you really should be following me. You should be converted.

You should be a Christian. I have a claim over your life. I died on the cross and through the Gospel. That claim is witching out. When Christ comes to claim your heart for himself, do you just say immediately, yes Lord, I'm thankful for that and here it is.

[10 : 37] Of course you don't. Neither do I. because you have an enmity in here against this God. An enmity that you and I caused and hold to until God smashes it by his power.

Look into your heart now. Look into your heart as the claim of the Christ of the cross reaches you. Look into your heart as he calls you to himself.

Look into your heart now as I must look into mine as the cross speaks to you of your need of salvation, of your need of washing, of your need of forgiveness, of your need of coming to capitulate, to cast down your arms against God and bow your knees submissively to him and give your life to him.

Look into your heart. What do you find? Is it a willingness is it a resistance? Is it like those who rejected Christ when he was crucified?

We will not have this man to rule over us. That's the enmity of the human heart. But that's not the enmity primarily that the text is dealing with.

[12 : 01] because there's something from God's side of the broken relationship that has to be dealt with and that's what the Bible talks about when it talks about the reconciliation that God has achieved by the blood of the cross.

Because when we sinned against God and rebelled against God, God didn't treat that lightly. God didn't act as if that wasn't really of much substance.

Which is why you find all through the Bible that there's an emphasis on both the enmity, the hostility of God toward us and the anger of God against us. And these are things that need to be dealt with and taken out of the way if we are to be saved.

You've only got to look back to the Garden of Eden and see what happened when man rebelled against God. How did God react?

We know how man reacted. He tried to hide from God. He had a guilty conscience. He knew that he had done wrong. He knew that he was in trouble. But why was he afraid? If God treats sin without being really angry, without having a hostility toward it, then why should man try to hide from God?

[13 : 24] Adam knew that he was in trouble. that now something sees that came between himself and God. And when God came into the garden where he once had fellowship with Adam, Adam knew that he had come to put the matter to him.

Adam, where are you? And once God had dealt with him, he drove him out of the garden. man. Just listen to those words. That's what the Bible tells us. He drove out the man that he had made, the human beings that he had created.

He drove them out of the garden. We've been looking in Genesis 1 at the prayer meeting of the wonder of God's creation, the wonder of God's formation of the universe.

And we left it last time. God willing, this week we'll come to look at the creation of man. but we left it last time at the point that Genesis 1 makes that all of that environment, all of that ordering, all of that creation and shaping, all of the coming about of these plants and these trees and these animals and the division of the waters and all of that is designed to be a suitable environment for the man that God is about to create.

[14 : 59] Why would God go to all that trouble? And why would God, having gone to all that trouble, drive the man out of the garden?

He didn't leave of his own accord. He didn't say, well, I think it might be a good idea if I left now. God ejected him.

God drove them out. God was angry with him. And God's wrath was against him. God's enmity toward him and his hostility was behind the driving out.

Does that mean that God ceased to love us? Does that mean that God gave up on the world in terms of loving the world? Of course not.

Some people make that mistake about the cross. They say, well, if God is angry and if God is hostile and if God has an enmity, then there's no such thing as the love of God.

[16 : 09] As the Bible describes it, that God loved the world so that he gave his only begotten son. He gave him to the death of the cross. What then? Well, what then is that you have to realize the God against whom we sinned, as we'll see in a moment, the God who is angry toward us, the God who has this hostility because of our sin toward us, he's the very one who took the first step to mend it.

And how did he take the first step to mend it? In his great love with which he loved us. That's the staggering thing about the cross. It presents at one and the same time it presents both the ferociousness of God and his anger against sin and the love of God towards sinners for their redemption.

It's all there. And it's all there so that you and I would know his peace through the blood of the cross. The enmity to remove.

Now you do notice there as well that through him to reconcile all things to himself. the sin of man is so serious that it's affected the whole of the creation.

Romans chapter 8 tells us that the creation is groaning and longing for something to happen. It's longing for the sons of God, the children of God to be revealed in their final state when the new heavens and the new earth and the glorified people of God will appear because the creation itself came under the curse of God through the sin of man.

[17 : 47] It's out of order, it's out of sync, it's not as it should be. The relationships within it are not as they should be. Man's use of it is not as it should be.

It's all out of step, out of order. And now God is saying through the cross he has been pleased to reconcile to himself all things.

Because God's salvation is about the new heavens and the new earth. For his people as a new creation with new hearts and new bodies after the resurrection.

That's why Revelation, the last book of the Bible, very near the end of the Bible, you find a description of that final state and God saying, about it, behold, I am making all things new.

It's the cross that's achieved it. Making peace by the blood of his cross. So the enmity to remove, very briefly. Secondly, there's a death which removed it.

[19 : 00] And it's first of all at God's initiative. Whenever there's a breakdown of relationships, whenever there's enmity between two or three or more people, it's always difficult to take the first step, isn't it?

You and I know that. We know that we should, but we know that it's difficult to do it. And sometimes we just don't do it. And we kind of cast the blame back at the other party or parties and say, well, it's really their fault, they did it, they're responsible, and they really should come to me.

That's not how the Bible actually counsels us, is it at all? It's that we should take the first step. Even if we're quite persuaded that all of the blame lies with somebody else, it's our responsibility to make peace.

Remember how we started that making peace is the likeness of God. Because God took the first step to mend this broken relationship between himself and human beings.

And you notice what it says here, in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, that's in Jesus, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, making peace by the blood of his cross.

[20 : 19] Now, it's better translated somewhat like in the OV, I think, for it pleased him, that's God the Father, it pleased him, that in Jesus, all the fullness of God should dwell, and through him to reconcile all things.

In other words, God the Father was pleased to make all the fullness of God reside in Jesus. That's really telling us that in the person of Jesus Christ, who is God's son in our nature, everything that's true of God is true of God in him.

he is fully God, all the fullness of God. God was pleased to make that dwell in the human person, the human Jesus in Christ, the son of God in our nature.

But, being pleased goes further than that. Because, to become human was not an end in itself for the son of God. God was pleased to make all fullness dwell in him, and therefore pleased to reconcile all things to himself through him, and pleased to make peace by the blood of the cross.

You see, the emphasis on God being pleased is right through the text. And, that itself is so important.

[21 : 46] God was pleased originally with what he had created. He looked at the work of his hands, as you find in Genesis 1, there as we have been seeing, and it was very good.

With everything that he had made, God was perfectly pleased. He had perfect satisfaction from it. And now you read, he was pleased to fix it, pleased to mend what had become broken, pleased to deal with the breakdown of the relationship, such a serious breakdown, yet God was pleased to do it, and pleased to do it by way of giving his son to the death of the cross.

Remember how Isaiah put it? Isaiah chapter 53, that great chapter which in my day you had to learn in school, which was such a good thing to learn.

But one of the verses in Isaiah 53, describing, as a prophecy describing the sufferings of Christ on the cross, was, yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him.

He has put him to grief. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. But you see, it was pleasing to God because the outcome was salvation for lost sinners.

[23 : 15] The outcome was reconciling all things to himself. The outcome was actually bringing together again what sin had broken, and broken so badly.

It pleased God that in him all fullness should dwell, so as to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.

It was by God's initiative. Are you not staggered today that the God against whom you and I sinned, and the sin by which we brought such a spoiling on God's creation and on the relationship between us?

Aren't you staggered? Aren't you amazed that this God who treats sin and sees sin so seriously should have taken the first step to mend what sin had broken?

If somebody comes and smashes up something you have spent a long time creating, something that you look at as a work of your own hands and you are really proud of, and it has taken you a long time to put it together, whatever it is, and somebody comes along and deliberately just takes it and smashes it to pieces, it is going to be very difficult to say to that person, look, I love you and I want to mend this relationship.

[24 : 40] That is what God has done. By the blood of the cross making peace at his own initiative, by his taking the first step, not us.

And that secondly, by God's Son, by the blood of the cross, by the death of Jesus, that's what paid the price, that's what brought about the peace that was needed on the part of God as well as ourselves.

Who was he? Who is he? Well, Colossians sets out in a wonderful way to describe who Jesus is. You can see it there in verse 19, the fullness of God dwelt in him.

You go to chapter 2 and verse 9, you find similarly there that in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. He is God.

He is fully God. And he was fully God in this world. God. I came across a thread on Facebook this week where some very bad theology was being bandied about where I felt obliged to comment back.

[26 : 05] Somebody had said that Jesus left his deity behind when he came to this world, although he still had the power of deity, that he wasn't really God.

He left his Godhood behind as he came into this world to be a human being, to be a servant. And then he took it up again afterwards. That's not just bad theology, that's heresy. Jesus is as fully God as an infant in Mary's arms as he was before he came into the world.

And he's as fully God as he hangs on the cross, dying, as he is at any other stage. He is God in our nature.

Fully God, fully human at the same time. And that's why it's not wrong to say that God through his Son incarnate, through his Son in our nature, experienced death.

Experienced the death we deserved. I know we can't understand all of that, or pack it into our minds, it's so great, and maybe you're saying to yourself, well that's going too far, surely, to say that God experienced this, even if it isn't the person of Jesus in our nature.

[27 : 33] Well, yes, because the human nature of Jesus has no existence, apart from it being united to the person of God's Son. And everything that was done by the human Jesus was done by the Son of God in that nature.

You only have to go to the book of Acts. There are two verses there that are remarkable in what they say. Acts chapter 3, verses 14 to 15, where it talks about the way in which the blood of Christ is mentioned as something that God himself was involved in.

That's Acts 3, verses 14 to 15, where you find the apostle there preaching, Peter, addressing the people, said, but you denied the holy and the righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and you killed the author of life.

Who's the author of life? Well, we read here in Colossians, all things were made by him, that's this Jesus, and all things were made through him. And in him dwelt all the fullness of the God and bodily.

Who's the author of life? Who gives us life? Who created us? This person did, this God did. That's the God who made peace by the blood of the cross, by his own blood in the person of his son.

[29 : 18] And chapter 20 of Acts has an equally remarkable statement. It talks there about the blood as well particularly, but this is how it puts it. Remember that Paul is actually dealing with the need to look after the church of God.

He's speaking there to the Ephesian elders. It's a very poignant emotional passage, but what he's saying is pay attention carefully to yourselves and to all the flock of God, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

The church of God which he obtained with his own blood, making peace by the blood of the cross. That's the amazing thing.

God took the penalty to himself that rightly was ours. God took the death that you and I deserved, and in the person of Jesus Christ, his son incarnate, he died that death.

There is nothing, nothing anywhere, nothing else in any teaching, in any philosophy, in any religion, in any other book, in any other event that ever took place in the history of this world, nor will there be quite like this.

[30 : 52] that God made peace by the blood of his cross, the cross of his own son. And he achieved God's peace in that.

It's not just any kind of enmity, it's the enmity with which God is hostile toward us. So it's not just any kind of peace that we require. That's why the Bible refers to the peace of God, peace that has a divine quality about it and to it.

And that's what the word reconcile there really has in it. Something quite wonderful, it has in this Greek word that's used to reconcile, it has the idea of bringing things back to how they were, to how they used to be.

In other words, God has put the cause of the breakdown behind him completely by the death of Christ. And you can see an illustration of that, I'm just covering these points very briefly, I know the time has passed, but you can see an illustration of that brilliantly in the return of the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15.

Because when he comes back in his filth from where he's been for all of these years in his lostness, in the mire that's attached to him, having fallen on such hard times, through his own fault, he is smothered in his father's arms, in the embrace of love and reconciliation.

[32 : 31] And even though the son has practiced the prayer that he's going to have, the confession that he's going to have to his father, the father smothers it, he doesn't complete it, it's as if the father is saying, that's enough of that, that's in the past, that's all behind us, it's a new life for you, it's a new relationship, it's a new beginning, it's a new creation, everything is new, the past is past.

That's what reconciliation is. It's bringing things back to how they were, it's bringing things back to how they should be and ought to be, it's bringing things back to how they're going to stay by the blood of Christ.

a death which removed the enmity at God's initiative, by God's Son through his death, and in achieving God's peace.

And thirdly, I'm just finishing with this, a peace extended to all of us in the Gospel. The greatest passage on reconciliation in the New Testament is 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

And if you read through that later on for yourself, you can see how the apostle is dealing with this great issue of the reconciliation that God has brought about through the death of Christ.

[33 : 52] And that immense verse with which the chapter finishes, chapter 5, 2 Corinthians, he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

That's the reality, that's the cross, that's God making peace by the blood of the cross. But the appeal of the Gospel is based on that.

It's based on the fact of that, it's based on the matter of this death of Christ being a really factual event, final and finished and complete.

And what is the appeal of the Gospel? Well, it's in that same passage. We beseech you, said Paul, as ambassadors of Christ. We beseech you in Christ's stead.

An ambassador, you see, acts for somebody of authority that sent him. An ambassador represents a government or a king. We are ambassadors for Christ.

[35 : 00] I am standing in this pulpit today, not because I am worthy of it, not to make a big thing of it for myself. God forbid.

I am in this pulpit today, representing the king. He has put me here. I am his ambassador. And through me, he is making this appeal to you.

Based on the death he died, we beseech you, be reconciled to God. What does that mean?

It means accept his peace. It means take to yourself the peace that already exists, that he has created by the blood of the cross.

He is not asking you to produce it. He is not asking you to create it. He is not asking you to achieve it. He is demanding that you accept it.

[36 : 13] And just like all those antique shows, when you find an antiques expert coming across, whether it's a vase, or ceramic, porcelain, whatever it is, silver, doesn't matter.

If it's something rare and really valuable, of course, they're looking to see if it's hallmarked, if it's silver, or if it's got a stamp on it, if it's ceramic, whatever it is. And of course, they'll tell you, and they'll point it out, usually, look, there it is, it tells you, made by so-and-so, made in so-and-so, it's so rare, this is worth a fortune.

Well, take this piece, this piece of God, turn it over, it's stamped, it tells you where it was made, and who made it.

It's marked, it's stamped, made by the blood of the cross, signed, Jesus Christ.

That's what God is saying. Be reconciled to me. Accept this piece. However priceless antiques may be said to be, this one is genuinely priceless, because it's full of life everlasting.

[37 : 46] Is it yours? Have you made it yours? Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for that wonderful peace, which we know that you have produced and achieved at such great cost.

We bless you, Lord, for all that you have done to bring this peace into being. we pray, Lord, as we express our regret and our sorrow over our sin that caused such pain and suffering to you.

Yet, Lord, we too come to express our gladness that you have overcome it in such a wondrous way. We pray that you bless to us your own word.

Hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.