

Reconciliation By Christ 2

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[0 : 00] I develop a certain phobia for that piece of furniture up there sometimes, but I don't want to go up there this morning, and so if you'll bear with me, I'll stay here.

And I want you to look at Colossians chapter 1 and verse 21 following the passage which was read as the first lesson this morning, Colossians chapter 1 verse 21, and it's on page 188 in your pew Bible.

And as I look out, I see some of you are students, and some of you are visitors, and some of you are old and wise, and some of you are steeped in tradition, and some of you are doubtful about the process, and some of you are caught up by the reality of the presence of God, that you wonder what the rest of the clods are doing here.

And all of us in different ways come from very different places, and we're just very different people, different intellectual capacities, different successes, and different patterns of failure in all our lives. And here we all are. And God addresses us through St. Paul, and he says, you, all of you, not you individually, but all of you.

[1 : 44] Sometimes people are, rightly or wrongly, led to tell me, you spoke directly to me this morning. And I'm grateful, but I don't.

But what God is doing is speaking to every one of us. And not only is he speaking to every one of us, but it is his purpose to speak to everyone, through everyone.

We need to hear from one another. Now look what it says. You, verse 21, and that you is all of you. You once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.

That's the condition in which God found us, or indeed may indeed find us, estranged from him, alienated.

Now, this alienation means that there used to be a relationship, but there isn't one now.

[2 : 47] And the results of that alienation, you will see, are enmity of mind, or hostility in our minds. And the hostility in our minds expresses itself by our doing evil deeds.

Because if you have an enemy, you don't mind hurting him. So the alienation is the result, results in hostility of mind, and the hostility of mind results in doing evil deeds.

And you don't have to scratch people very deeply when you meet them in all sorts of casual circumstances to find the reality of that enmity, that hostility towards God.

I, in my business, run into it all the time. A deep hostility towards God. A relationship that is broken down so badly that people don't have anything to do with each other.

That is, across this barrier between God and man. There is real anger, real hurt, real wrath, a real desire, really, to do evil things in order to show God our independence of him.

[4 : 06] That's the position we're in. Basic, estrangement, enmity of mind, and the evil deeds which result from it. Am I telling you something you never knew?

Well, I don't mean to be. I'm only telling you something that I hope we all know, but I don't know that we understand the implications of it.

So the first word I want you to get hold of is alienated. The second word I want you to find is reconcile. And this is what God has done for us in Christ.

Look how it's written. You who were estranged, verse 22, he has now reconciled in his body. So, I am concerned about this.

You know that there is, there's a whole lot of what you have to call one issue politics around. Like, if you have seen any stop signs in this area, you will see that they now serve the purpose of saying, stop the cruise missile.

[5 : 21] And the cruise missile, as far as the parliament is concerned, has not been stopped. And people are lining up to stop the cruise missile. And people are lining up to stop abortion.

And people are lining up to stop killing whales. And people are lining up to stop killing baby seals. And people are lining up to protect the gun lobby.

And people are lining up to protect the tobacco lobby. And what we're being confronted with as people is all sorts of one issue things that a whole group of people can get behind and give tremendous trust to.

And I confess to you, and this isn't by way of protesting anything, I confess I don't know what to do with single issues. Because all sorts of people can come from all sorts of backgrounds and all get behind a single issue for all sorts of different reasons.

But I, and I, if you can help me with this, I'd be grateful. I'm in my office all week. Come and tell me what the answer is. The difficulty that I have with single issues is I want to know why.

[6 : 46] Why do you want to stop the cruise missile? Now I can think that there's lots of good reasons why you might want to do it. But is it because you believe that there is the possibility of a world in which men will not organize armies to fight against men?

Why do you want to do it? What's the basic issue that these single issues bring to life?

Because they must bring certain things to life. Is it our conception that all men from all colors and all creeds and all economic systems can all dwell together in love and charity with one another?

How are they going to do that? I don't mean to be disdainful, but if you happen to put a pail of pig slop in a trough and you have eight pigs and you get in there and argue with them about who should come first to the trough, you're going to get trampled into the muck.

Now, that may be too low a view of human nature, but the fact of it is that unless men have some underlying and basic agreement about what the meaning of human life is and what the meaning of human history is, and if I may use the words what the purpose of God is among men, then what are we going to do when we win victories in all the areas of the single issues which we take to be of paramount importance?

[8 : 28] Now, the World Council of Churches, I'm sure, is going to be ruined by some people if they get the chance by making them line up on single issues.

And every possible lobby group will get the World Council of Churches to endorse their issue, whatever it is. And these may be very legitimate issues.

I'm not arguing that point. They may be entirely legitimate issues. But the basic function of the Church of Jesus Christ will be overlooked on every front page unless something miraculous happens to show what the fundamental issue is.

To get a bishop anarchy. Here's a little story. I just thought about... Yeah. It's a story about the archbishop that you've probably all heard.

But it illustrates how you can confuse... The archbishop of Canterbury arrived in New York City and one of the reporters came up and said to him, Archbishop, you're going to the nightclubs.

[9 : 43] Archbishop, you're going to the nightclubs. And the archbishop said, do they have nightclubs here? And so the newspaper headline comes out, Archbishop's first question, do they have nightclubs here?

Well, you may see quite a lot of that when this week gets going. And it's because of the problem of saying what the Church is all about.

And what the Church of Jesus Christ is all about is here, I think in Colossians, when he's writing and says, you who were once estranged have been reconciled by Christ.

And he wants... It goes on to say, and I want you to look at the very words in which it says it, he wants you to be reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.

Now this is the picture really of unilateral disarmament. It's unilateral in the sense that Christ comes into the world and approaches the very throne of the power of evil unarmed.

[11 : 08] He doesn't bring anything with him. He comes in this body of flesh and he approaches the throne of principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world and they do what they inevitably must do.

They destroy him. Now, that I think is recognized by most people who are not in favor of unilateral disarmament, that the danger is that the powers of death in the hands of men will be used.

So how can you affect a reconciliation if the cost of it is that you're going to be wiped out anyway? And you see, that, I think, is where the mystery of the gospel may begin to break through to us that just exactly what did Christ do?

Well, he faced the enemy unarmed and the enemy put him to death. But God in his glory raised him from the dead and he went on with the same mission.

Now, not subject to a life which could be destroyed, but in the power of the resurrection to effect the reconciliation between God and man, which has got to be the basis of the reconciliation between men and men.

[12 : 42] No matter what their political views may be, no matter what their present ideologies may be, no matter what their hopes and ambitions may be, that there has got to be a fundamental ground of reconciliation between men the world over.

And that's why Paul says, you, all of you, were alienated. And you hath he reconciled in his body by his death on the cross.

That God has effected unilaterally, without our consent, participation, or necessary agreement, he has effected our reconciliation.

And this is what we come to believe. As a community of Christians, among the community of men, we are to believe that God has, in Christ, by his death on the cross, effected a reconciliation by which all men can find that oneness and unity for which we deeply long in our hearts, but which we dare not hope for because we haven't the means of bringing it about.

Christ has reconciled us by his body in his death. And do you see what the purpose of him reconciling us is?

[14 : 19] Watch this, because you're going to get trapped by it. He's done it, it says, in order to present you, all of you again, holy and blameless and irreproachable.

How many of you want to be holy, blameless, and irreproachable? Well, I know it's not one of my great ambitions. I like me pretty much the way I am.

Just another pig at the trough. But I... It's... Some people call it clean, pure, and without blame.

Holy, blameless, and irreproachable. That's not the burning desire of my heart to be that. But you see, this is the point. This may not be the burning desire of your heart or mine in our human pride, but it is the purpose of God.

And part of what happens is that God has his purpose in our lives to make us holy, pure, and blameless, to present us to himself.

[15 : 37] Now, what are the conditions? The conditions are, as it describes it there, provided that you continue in the faith stable and steadfast.

In other words, it's required of us to hang in. This is the faith that we have as Christians, that our profound reconciliation, the grounds of a profound reconciliation, have been established in Christ. And we're to hold on to it, to that reality. Now, whether your cause is Amnesty International or Wales or nuclear disarmament or cruise missiles, whatever that may be that God may lead you into, hold on to the underlying reality of the reconciliation that God has effected between himself and all of us through Jesus Christ.

hold on to that. And that's our primary responsibility, no matter what cause we may get caught up in, is to hold on to the reality of that reconciliation, to continue steadfastly in that faith, never to be dislodged, to maintain a firm position.

These are different translations. You see, we've got to do it together. That's why we need each other within the fellowship of the church.

[17 : 17] Because we're not going to hold on by ourselves. We're not going to hold on unless we have the support and encouragement of others. Otherwise, we're just like a balloon in a circus sideshow, sitting there and somebody's there with a dart.

You know, it's too easy. We can be finished off in no time. But together, we've got to hold on and to maintain this faith in the reconciliation which God has effected in Christ.

And then Paul goes on to talk about how this is to be achieved, how we are to hold on to it, and how we are to maintain it.

And what he says to us is this, that it involves suffering. It involved his suffering. I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. In my flesh, I complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body.

That is the church of which I became a minister. Notice he said it twice. The gospel of which I, Paul, became a minister and the church of which I became a minister according to God's, according to the divine office which was given to me.

[18 : 33] So that what the church is to do is to serve the purposes of the message of the gospel and to serve the community of the church.

That's what ministry is. That's what it's important for us to do, as Paul did, to share in the sufferings of Christ in this world and to share in ministering to one another that we might hold on to the reconciliation that God has effected and know that that's where man has to come to finally.

We all have to come there. And we all very much need each other in order to do it. You need one another. We need one another.

That's why I want you all to belong to a Bible study group. That's why I want you all to learn to pray together. That's why I want you all to get together and meet and discuss and debate and argue and do anything you want.

But let's hold on to the reality of what God has done for us in Christ. We need one another. You can come if all you've got to say from my point of view, there's a lot of questions I'd like to ask.

[19 : 45] Ask them. Nobody is going to be destroyed by them. And on the other hand, you might come and say, it has been my experience that what God has done in Christ has been the basis of a reconciliation on which the whole of my life is built.

Tell somebody about that. Well, that's what the ministry involves. And that's what Paul was as a minister or a servant of the gospel and a servant of the word of God.

So that there is a message of reconciliation which is to be got out to everybody. And then it says there's a mystery to be understood.

And look at it in verse 27. To them, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery. Paul recognizes that there is a mystery.

There is a mystery at the basis of the life of the church. Why does it exist? Why does it carry on? In a world where it suffers from massive indifference, in a world where it suffers from people who don't want to participate, people who have lost sight of the objectives, in a world where all sorts of people are locked into issues which ultimately are not final issues, in that kind of a world there is a mystery to the reality of the gospel.

[21 : 25] What is it that God is doing? What is God doing in bringing us together on this Sunday morning to worship Him? What is God doing in our tenuous relationships with one another?

If poverty hit us really hard, we'd appreciate one another. If illness overcame you, we could support you or we could support one another in that situation.

But as long as we can get by, we tend to live in a deluded world where we don't think we need one another and we don't understand the mystery of the gospel.

Now, I'm not going to tell you what the mystery is. It's seven words and it's in the Bible and you can look it up for yourself. But having looked it up, you might still not understand it.

It might still be a riddle. And again, that's what you need to figure out. And that's why we need one another to take that riddle to one another and say, what does this mean?

[22 : 29] What does this mean to you? What does it mean to us? to work out this riddle in the circumstances of our lives? Well, having worked out the riddle, you know, I, I, I, I meet a lot of unbelief in the course of a week.

And one of the, one of the great comforts of going to lectures at Regent this past couple of weeks is to watch other people try and explain the mystery. and to see words fail them when they get too close to them.

To see learned professors try and put it in words so anybody can reach out and grab it. And just at the point at which they want to do that, they can't quite find the words to put their hands or to help you put your hand around the mystery of what God is doing in Christ.

It remains in some peculiar way a mystery. A mystery in the sense that, that we can't, we can't comprehend it. One of the lovely pictures I got this week of our whole discussion of God and I think it was from Dr. Thistleton who, who describes what you do is you try and take the oceans in your two hands when you just try and describe the mystery of the purpose of God.

you're trying to take the ocean in your two hands. But God, by His Holy Spirit, gives us an awareness of what this mystery is, of what it is that He's doing in our lives.

[24 : 11] The mystery, and it's because of that mystery that we continue on, we hang in, we contend for the faith and bear witness to that reality among the nations because God has effected this reconciliation.

Well, that's what Paul says belongs to all of us. I'm confused now.

Let's just stop for a minute and pray and then I want to carry on. Could we just, just sit where you are and bow your heads with me for a moment. Our Father, there is no way but by Your Holy Spirit that we can see how You are at work in our lives.

We desperately need to see that. We need to see what it is You are calling us as a congregation in this place at this time in history.

What it is You are calling us to do. How we might fully know the mystery hidden for ages and generations of which You have chosen to make manifest to Your saints.

[25 : 43] God grant that we as a congregation may come to grips with that mystery in Christ's name.

It's just that I feel that we need to be faced with that reality and to recognize that in the formality of our church going, we must encounter the reality of that mystery which has been hidden and which has now been manifested.

Then look what happens in the last verses. Verse 28 and 29. Paul describes what his work is.

Him we proclaim, warning every man, teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man mature in Christ. That's what he has for us.

He has a maturity. Do you remember that when it talked about Christ wanting to present us pure and holy and blameless? Now it comes back to Paul's ministry is to present men warned, taught, and instructed in the faith.

[27 : 04] He wants to present them in that way. And you know how I think it works out? The thing that, the reality that I think you and I and we together have to grasp and live.

And that is the reality. You know, like when you come to church, as I come to church, you see, I come full of pride and arrogance and all sorts of things which are just part of my sinful nature and your sinful nature may be more modest, but it's still sinful.

And we come with all that pretension about who we are and how important we are. And that, I think, confuses the picture because it's the work, Paul says, which he's involved in, that every man, Christ may be proclaimed to every man and that he may be taught in all wisdom and that every man may be presented mature in Christ.

Now, if you look back at the mystery, the riddle that I wanted you to look at, you'll see that it talks about being in Christ, too. But what I think Paul is teaching us here is this, that though we, by nature, say, I hope you know who I am, and then if they don't, you tell them, and you tell them about what you've done, you may have been, you may be one of the great beauties of the 20th century, you may be a great athlete, you may be a great businessman, you may be a very important person, you may have made great discoveries, and you have to tell people who you are in order that they will respect you.

On the other hand, you may be one of those people who's a disaster, and you identify yourself in terms of your personal disaster, which is bigger than other people's disaster.

[29 : 05] Well, either of them are acceptable as being ways in which we can present ourselves. This is who I am. I have survived this disaster, or I have attained this goal.

This is who I am. And then we spend the rest of our life as the years go on trying to protect what we once were. Do you know who I once was?

Do you know who I am? Do you know where I went? Do you know what I did? I hope you do. And all that becomes the way we live. But when Paul says, I want to present every man mature in Christ, he means, I want to present every man, not in terms of what he is or in what he has been, but what he will be.

To live now in terms of what you're going to be then instead of living now in terms of what you used to be then. to live now with the full impact of what God has done for you in Christ as the central reality about who you are and what you're going to be and what we're going to be.

So that as Christians, we don't come together to compare our accomplishments. We come together to rejoice in what we're going to be as God fulfills in us the purpose that he has begun in us now.

[30 : 38] That's what we're to be. That's what we're to be right now. Not the sum total of what we have been, which we're trying to hold on to. But we're to be right now the sum total of what we're going to be.

Mature in Christ. Every man mature in Christ. That's who you are. Whatever you are now, it'll fade. I took communion to an old people's home the other day. And in terms of maintaining our human glory, it's pretty hard to do at that stage when physical life has left you and when sanity may even

have left you.

There's not much you can do about rejoicing in what you have been there. but there's tremendous amount to rejoice in about what you're going to be. That's terribly important.

And that's who you are right now. Not what you have been, but who you're going to be. That's why Paul says that I work on, I press on with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me in order to present you mature in Christ.

[31 : 58] That's what he wants to do for you and me. He wants us to be now and to hold on to what we are now as the foretaste of what we're going to be and not the aftertaste of what we have been.

because what we're going to be is what God is going to bring us to. That's the heart of the mystery of our being in Christ.

That's the heart of what God is going to do for us. Well, there's Colossians chapter 1 verses 21 to the end.

May God grant that by his Holy Spirit you will be able to take hold for yourself of some of the reality of the purpose of God. It began with you, all of you, but it ends with you, each of you.

And for the each of you, it's this. Him we proclaim warning each of you and teaching each of you in all wisdom that we may present each of you mature in Christ.

[33 : 20] And this is the work for which Paul toils, striving with all the energy which God inspires within. He came everyone whose heart stirred him up and everyone whom his spirit made willing and they brought the Lord's offer.

Hymn 596. Hymn 596. He dice a broken mind He came■