

Reconciled by the Risen Christ

Colossians 1:15-23

Christians generally understand that Jesus died on the cross and made atonement for our sins. But what happened when He rose from the dead? What does it matter that Jesus came out of the grave with the same body He had before? It's true as far as it goes that Jesus died so we would go to heaven when we die, but this leaves out the full impact of His resurrection. The enmity that ruled the world since the fall of Adam died on the cross with Jesus. His resurrection declared His victory sine and death, and the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth to God the Father.

Overview of the Text

Mankind bears the image of God, but Jesus is the image of invisible God, and as such is the firstborn of all creation (v. 15). Paul isn't saying Jesus is a created being but the best of all (cf. 2:9). Rather, as the second person of the Trinity and God's only-begotten Son, He also takes preeminence over the creation: "All things were created through Him and for Him" (v. 16). Notice this doesn't just include Christians and churches, but *all things* in heaven and earth whether they be thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers. Local, regional, national, international, and celestial powers all exist for Christ. He is before them in time and rank, and in Him all things hold together in the present (v. 17). His preeminence applies in the church as well where Jesus is the head of body; He is the beginning (*arche*; cf. Jn. 1:1) and therefore the firstborn from the dead (v. 18). As the head goes, so the body follows. Paul squashes the idea that Christ is less than the Father or has somehow been demoted to the task of redemption. No, it pleased the Father that all fullness dwells in the Son, and therefore He chose to reconcile all things in heaven and earth—those same things that were made by and for the Son—to Himself through the blood of the cross (vv. 19-20). But it's not just cosmic realities that the cross affects. Individuals in Colossae and the world over, who were once alienated in mind by wicked works, God reconciled in the body of Jesus' flesh through death in order to present you holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight (vv. 21-22). This will occur through steadfast perseverance in the faith, anchored in the hope of the gospel, which was preached to every creature, and even conquered the murderous Paul of Tarsus and made him a minister (v. 23).

Cosmic Reconciliation

See the scope of what has been created by and for Christ (v. 16). God created the heavens and earth, and all of it was very good (Gen. 1:31). The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy when He laid the earth's foundation (Job 38:7). We know Satan rebelled against God, led angels with him (Rev. 12:3-4), and drew Adam into sin and death (Gen. 3:14-15). Mankind was the pinnacle of creation on earth, and when he sinned, everything fell into bondage to decay (Rom. 8:21). But would this be end of the story for this world—rebellion, chaos, and death, and God's people escaping by going to heaven when they die like Jesus did? Paul says no. But tragically this is how many believers think of the gospel today. It's a reduced gospel, shorn of the hope and power of resurrection. Paul says Christ was the beginning, made all thing for Himself, and came to take everything back. And when did He take it? Not at the virgin birth. Not when He was twelve years old learning at the temple. Not at His baptism in the Jordan River or resisting temptation in the wilderness. All this was necessary, but it culminated at His resurrection: "the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (v. 18).

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In the old covenant that nations were led astray by principalities and powers. Daniel describes the angel Michael fighting with celestial princes of Persia and Greece (Dan. 10:13, 20). Israel struggled to not worship the pagan gods of the surrounding nations. Those gods had a different strength before Christ triumphed on the cross and disarmed the principalities and powers (Col. 2:15). His whole life prepared Him for this conquest, and had the Devil and rulers of the age known what would happen as a result of the cross, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). As the second Adam, the new mankind, the greater prophet than Moses, the new high priest of the order of Melchizedek, and the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus propitiated the wrath of God with His own blood and has reconciled all things to Himself (v. 20). Isaiah envisioned the day when the Lord's house would be established on the top of the mountains and all nations would flow to it. He will judge between nations, rebuke many, and they will beat their swords into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks, and study war no more (Is. 2:1-4). Having died and rose, Christ told us to disciple the nations (Matt. 28:19-20).

The Already, Not Yet of Reconciliation

This is what the risen Jesus means. He died so “that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14-15). Tyrants control people through fear of death. But Jesus trusted the Father to death, and He delivered Him, showing us that we need not, must not, fear death because we've been reconciled to the Father. We not only don't fear standing before Him, we positively look forward to it.

The Already/Not Yet describes our current state of salvation. We've already been saved through Christ's death and resurrection, but we are also being saved and forgiven of our sins every day. We will ultimately be completely free of sin and completed saved. God will finish the good work He started (Phil. 1:6). Similarly, we are already God's children, received through Christ, but we still eagerly await “the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). So it is with reconciliation. All things are reconciled in principle to God, but the work of the cross is not yet finished. Jesus finished His work on the cross but the cross is still having its transforming effect on you and the world. Many nations, tribes, clans, families, and individuals have been reconciled to God and to one another, but not enough. The risen Jesus is reigning at the right hand of the Father until “He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

Be Reconciled

The call of the gospel is not to leave the sinking ship of this world and hop into a lifeboat. The call is to leave your rickety rubber raft and get on God's ark. All things have been made new because in Christ God reconciled the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19). Walk away and be cleansed from wicked works that alienate you in heart and mind from God. Christ who never sinned became sin on the cross so that we would become the righteousness of God in Him.