

Colossians – August 10th, 2014 – Colossians 1:19-23

Review of Gnosticism and 1:15-18

Gnosticism was a religious movement of the first 3 centuries that combined Greek, Jewish, and Christian ideas into one philosophical religion. The name comes from the Greek word *gnosis* which means *knowledge*. Adherents to this philosophy were known as the *Gnostics*, that is, *knowledgeable ones* or *intellectuals*.

Greek thought provided their view of an upstairs and downstairs world, that is, spirit (which is good) and matter (which is evil). Christian thought provided *Jesus* and His teachings on ethics to the Gnostics. Jewish thought provided lots regulations and the keeping of religious *laws* as derived from the OT and expanded upon. Gnosticism was a conglomeration of all three.

Basic Gnostic beliefs:

1. ***Spirit*** alone is good and ***all physical matter*** is evil.
2. The good God issued forth a series of *emanations*, each one of which contained a little bit less of the total *divine fullness* (Greek word *pleroma*) until a distant emanation who had none of the original *pleroma*, or *divine principle*, could touch this evil matter and form the world.
3. Since Jesus was good and matter is evil, *Jesus' body* was not really flesh and blood. It was merely a phantom. Gnostics taught that when Jesus walked on the beach, He didn't leave footprints. His body was not real.
4. Since Jesus was at least one emanation removed from God, His spirit contained *some* fraction less of the *divine fullness* (Greek *pleroma*) of which God possessed.
5. A person is not saved by the free gift of grace through faith, but by a complex series of works, known only through esoteric *knowledge* gained from the gnostic teachers.

Vs. 15-18 ñ Paul immediately begins to counter this false teaching. He begins with the Gnostic's false teachings about Jesus and who He is.

1. Jesus and His relationship to God ñ He is God, one member of the Trinity (vs. 15)
2. Jesus and His relationship to the things seen in this world ñ He created them (vs. 16)
3. Jesus and His relationship to things in the unseen world ñ He created it and the angels (vs. 16)
4. Jesus and His relationship to the new creation, that is, the church ñ He is the originator of the new creation (vs. 18) and the preeminent one in the spiritual resurrection (vs. 18)

Colossians 1:19-23

Vs. 19 ñ How could this *man* Jesus, be so great, so high-ranking such as to be the *head* of the body (vs. 18), and the *originator* of the church (vs. 18)? The reason is because this Jesus

was more than a mere man. “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness (pleroma) to dwell in Him” (vs. 19).

The Gnostics taught that God cloned Himself. Each clone, or emanation, contained some small amount less of the “divine principle” than did the previous one. That was their attempt at explaining how a good God could create an evil world, “He couldn’t,” they said, “He cloned Himself, each clone containing a lesser amount of the ‘FULLNESS’ (Greek = pleroma) of the ‘divine principle,’ until somewhere down the road, a distant emanation with no ‘pleroma’ could form this world out of evil matter. But Paul says, ‘All the pleroma dwells in Jesus.’ Jesus is fully God, not a lesser deity or an emanation with less of the divine fullness. He contains it all! Jesus was 100% man and 100% God, all at the same time.

Vs. 20 ñ This God-man is the only one who was capable of restoring the broken relationship between God and man. Why was He the only one? There was nothing or no one else of such high value, as Jesus, that could be given as “payment” to redeem the high-value souls of humanity and pay the high value price that sin had cost the human race. Only Jesus was worthy to pay that price. It costs a nickel for a pretzel, \$3.00 for a McDonald’s sandwich, \$150,000 for a house, what does it cost to pay for human sin? We’re in the big leagues now. Sin has wreaked havoc and destroyed our relationship with God, how high of a price must it be to pay that debt? The price is met in only one, the One with the highest value in the universe, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why verse 20 says that it was “through Him,” that God would “reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross, through Him, I say” — “No lesser payment would satisfy the needs of this situation. It took the Son of God to pay the high price of sin. And through Him, all things were reconciled to God.

Vs. 21-22 ñ “Although you were formerly alienated and hostile — engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless —”

We need to talk about that word, “reconciled” or “reconciliation.” Before we do, note that Paul again counteracts the Gnostic teachings about Jesus. The Gnostics taught that being “good,” Jesus could not be flesh since matter is inherently evil, but that instead, He was a phantom, His feet did not leave footprints on the beach, remember? Look what Paul says in verse 22, “in His FLESHLY body,” which died on the cross. Paul is at pains to articulate the reality of who Jesus is, a true man, with a true, real, actual, human body. He was not a phantom.

Reconciliation

Did you notice that in verses 20-22, all Paul cared to talk about was reconciliation, reconciliation, reconciliation. In order for reconciliation to take place, Jesus had to take on flesh, that is why verse 19 exists, to set up the fact that a fleshly physical sacrifice would be offered as payment for the physical attributes of this world, including us humans! Thus, vs. 19, “it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,” and then vs. 20, “and through Him (using that physical body), to reconcile all things to Himself.” [see Hebrews 10:5]

Let’s look at this word “reconciliation.”

The verb form is *katallasse*, the noun form is *katallaxis*.
The Greek is: *apokatallasso*. Apo ka tal las so

Katallasse is the normal Greek word for *katallasse*. When the Greek language added a preposition to a verb, in this case, *apo*, it was to intensify the force of the verb. Why would Paul want to intensify this concept of *katallaxis* and add that preposition to the verb? It was because the Colossians (and maybe you are too) were scared that something other than Christ and faith in Him was necessary for their salvation. They were getting nervous, that something more *is* are you nervous about that? Are you worried, *is* haven't been good enough, maybe there's something more needed. I know my heart, I see my life, I'm scared. Maybe I need to do all these other things *is*. So Paul says, using the preposition *apo* before *katallasse*, **RECONCILIATION** (genuine, honest, total, for real, reconciliation) has occurred through Christ and Him alone. [Note to Jim: scream the word *katallaxis* when you say the previous sentence so that the people understand this is not just measly reconciliation, but **RECONCILIATION** with GOD ALMIGHTY] He did it, and Paul intensified it with *apo*.

To reconcile = to bring back to a former state of harmony.

In other words, it implies that some state of harmony has been broken. Did you ever have a broken relationship with someone? Reconciliation is to bring you back to a former state of harmony. It relates to putting two warring parties back together. This word is often heard in divorce court. *We can't reconcile so I want a divorce* the divorce decree reads.

In reconciliation, Biblically speaking, here is what happens, we come to a state of peace with God, our creator. If one is in this church today, and that one hasn't had reconciliation with God, then the Bible declares that one to be the enemy of God. What? I'm not the enemy of God, says the one who hasn't come to Christ. Oh yes, the Bible declares so. But after coming to God through Christ, we become His friend, we have peace, this, after reconciliation with God. But one might say, *is* do much good for people, I helped my neighbor with her snow covered drive-way last year. *Big deal*. King James: *Biggeth deal*. What we need is reconciliation, to be brought back to a former state of harmony. 2 Corinthians 5:19, *God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting our trespasses against us. And He has committed to us, the word of reconciliation*.

Let's look at verse 20 again, *and through Christ, to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven*. There are four things we want to look at in this verse. This is such great news:

1. **Reconciliation is a work of God** *is* what a relief! If it up to me to do something to be reconciled, I'd never be sure if I'd done enough. After all, God is holy, and I, am I. I may have to go out knocking on doors, giving 50 cent brochures to people, hoping to earn my reconciliation and calling myself a Witness for Jehovah. But verse 20 says, *through Jesus, He reconciled all things to Himself*. Point? **Reconciliation is a work of God**. Verse 21 states that in our former state, we were *alienated and hostile* *is* yet now, HE has reconciled you *is*
2. **Reconciliation is a work that HAS ALREADY BEEN accomplished** *is* look at that. Vs. 20, *He reconciled all things to Himself, having made* *is* *is* not, *will make peace* in the future,

nor ~~is~~ making peace in the present, but **having made** peace through the blood of His cross. The Greek verb is called an *áorist* verb, that is, past tense. It occurred in the past. Thus, reconciliation rests not on human achievement, but upon human acceptance of the work on the cross that God did long ago! You don't have to do something to earn reconciliation, you simply must say, "Thank you, I believe in what Christ did for me" and accept the peace that God offers. Forget the sins you committed this week, in this sense forget them, your lack of sinning never brought you salvation in the first place, your lack of sinning never brought you reconciliation in the first place. Your sinning this past week will not destroy your status before God today. Reconciliation is a work of God, it was a work that was accomplished 2 millennia ago. That should bring a measure of peace.

3. **Reconciliation was achieved at the cross.** "He made peace through the blood of His cross" (vs. 20). You say, "How did He do this reconciliation, how did He bring it about?" At and through the cross. That's why the bottom line of all bottom line fundamental truths regarding Christianity is to go to the cross. The cross is our inspiration, the cross is our hope, the cross is the whole point, it's at the center of the Christian faith, and that is why when things go in the wrong direction, spiritually, in my life, contemplating what Christ did for me on the cross helps motivate a repentant heart. What did that cross mean for me? And when I reflect on it, I get inspired all over again to live for Him. So when you hear a message from some leader that says, "Hey, let's get past the cross, I don't want to talk about the cross, come on, we're modern, that's bloody, that's gross, that's barbaric and old-fashioned," whatever that preaching is, it's not Christianity. The cross is where it all began and will always be at the center.
4. **Reconciliation takes in ALL things.** "He reconciled all things to Himself" – whether things on earth or things in heaven. This phrase has caused great consternation in the church and forced much ingenious thinking on the part of many commentators. The text is not that complicated. It does not mean that all will be saved but that all who avail themselves of the offered reconciliation will be saved by Christ's blood. The **potential for reconciliation extends to ALL**, though many will not receive it. Also, proof that even "things" have been reconciled by Christ can be seen in the teaching that after Christ returns the second time, the lion will lay down with the lamb. Christ's death even reconciled "nature." And although nature hasn't manifested that reconciliation yet (there are still hurricanes and tornados), nevertheless, it will, after Christ returns (see Romans 8:21-23). That is why Isaiah can say, "the baby will play in the viper's den" (Isaiah 11) in that day, because Christ's death has reconciled "things," as well as "people." Nothing and no one, including Marilyn, lies outside the scope of His reconciling work.

The little phrase, "things in heaven" have also been reconciled need mean nothing more than the fact that the realm of the sky, where clouds and tempest gather, where lightning and thunder form, has also been set free from war with God; or perhaps included is the realm of the starry skies, what we call outer space, where no longer will there be "nova's" or "super nova's" or stars that burn out, for Christ's reconciliation extends even to "things" in outer space.

Thus, with these 4 points, Paul delivers comforting news to the people at Colossae who were worrying whether or not they had even started a relationship with the Living God, given the fact that they were being told they didn't have enough information, knowledge, and religious ritual to satisfy God. Paul retorts, "Oh yes you do, in Christ, you already have it all."

Vs. 22 again ñ Notice, though, that there is a purpose for this reconciliation and we who have been reconciled need to see it.    He has now reconciled you    in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.  The reconciliation was such that when God looks at you, He says,  I am at peace with that person, but also so that you can shed the undo pressure to measure up, the impossible to deal with guilt, in terms of living before God in a perfectly holy way. So now, we are freed up to live a life pleasing to Him, not under the pressure of doing more so as to earn reconciliation, but so as to bring our lives into actual manifestation of the holy people we are declared by God in our reconciliation to be.

[Talk about the word, justification ñ an act of God whereby a sinner is declared righteous]

Our reconciliation did not occur simply so that we can go on living in our sinful ways. No, there is another purpose besides just declaring that we are at peace with God, it is to turn us into suitable people, fit to live in His living room. Our dogs are trained in discipline so that they are worthy to live in the house with us. God also desires that we live in a way that is suitable for His kingdom. And so He reconciled us so that we can be freed up to live for Him, not under pressure, but out of thankful hearts, realizing that this is what He wants.

Vs. 23 ñ This verse teaches says that we are always reconciled with Christ if we simply continue in the faith. He has reconciled you,  if you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul was made a minister.  All this verse really says is that we need to continue in the faith and not deny belief in our Savior Jesus. Some like to fight over these words and set up theological battles over them (along come Calvinists and along come non-Calvinists; the battles rage). But the simple truth is this, regardless of how one works out the details, Paul urges us to just continue in the faith. That is, just keep trusting that Christ and His work on the cross is your only hope for salvation, your only hope for reconciliation; and that there is nothing that you can do to add to that work, nothing that might claim merit as a cause of salvation. It isn  as difficult as theologians make it. If you think at this moment, my only hope for salvation is faith in the blood that Christ shed on the cross, you are continuing in the faith. Paul encourages us to continue down that line.

Conclusion

In the chapters ahead, Paul will help us put away our sin. In this section, his plan was to enable us to see that our salvation rests not on what we do, what we don  do, whether or not we fail God, what we know in terms of advanced learning, or how little we sin. Rather, Paul is at pains to show us that our reconciliation and salvation with God rests on what Christ did, already, in the past, for YOU and ME, and our need to believe in who He is and what He did on the cross for us.