

From chaos to cosmos

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[0 : 00] The portion we read, Colossians 1. And let us read again verses 21 and 22.

And you, the apostle writes, you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight.

Now this morning we were thinking of a great statement of the apostle John in his first letter. He says, truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And we were seeing how the word fellowship has a very rich and spacious meaning. And that in its essence, at its simplest, it means this, that we have all things in common, not merely with one another, but that we have all things in common with God.

We are brought into the circle of friendship with God. Now, of course, that depends. All that we were talking about this morning depends upon other things.

[1 : 27] How is it possible that God is able to take creatures like us and bring us into his presence and have fellowship with us, become our friend and make us his friends?

And in essence, that's what I want to look at this evening. Now, the words of our text may seem, at first sight, a little complicated, not nearly as simple as what we were looking at this morning.

In fact, in essence, they're much more simple. But there are more of the words, and the thought is a little more full, perhaps. So I want to take time to introduce ourselves to the text in its context.

Now, there are two very brief declarations at the heart of this epistle to the Colossians that really embody its teaching.

In chapter 2, verses 9 and 10, just listen to this. In chapter 2, verse 9, we read that the apostle says of Jesus the Christ, In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

[2 : 40] And then he says this, and you are complete in him. He looks at the Savior and he says, in him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.

And then he looks out at the believers in the church and he says, Your fullness or your completeness is found in him. And that really gathers up and focuses, it pinpoints, the whole theme of the letter to the Colossians.

It is the glorious Christ. I remember many years ago now being asked to prepare, to give four talks on Colossians for an IVF conference from Glasgow and Stathclyde University.

And that was the first time I really paid very much close attention to Colossians. And I was absolutely thrilled to see how throughout it centers in on the one who is our salvation.

It sets out the glorious Christ. And then it sets out to tell us, not only that he is glorious, but that these glories have been put, in the grace of God they have been put at our disposal.

[3 : 59] We have a great Savior when we have Jesus. In him dwells all that God is. And we are full in him.

Now, in the course of dealing with that tremendous subject, the Apostle wrote some of the most wonderful things, if we can make that distinction, some of the most wonderful things in the whole of the New Testament about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here, in the run-up to our text, only just to notice that he sets out the glory of Christ in relation to three different spheres, so that there is a three-fold glory of the Redeemer in his eye as he works up towards our text.

Now, first of all, he sets out the glory of Christ in relation to the Father. Did you notice that? Verse 15, he's talking about, verse 14, the one in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin.

And then he says, who is the image of the invisible God. There is his glory in relation to God.

[5 : 15] He is the image, the perfect facsimile of it, the perfect representation of it, the perfect outline. He is the image of the invisible.

Or we could put that another way. In Christ, this is one aspect of his glory, the invisible God is made visible. Do you want to know what God is like? He's like Jesus.

He said, Jesus, that hath seen me, hath seen the Father. To see Jesus by faith, that's to look upon the invisible God.

Isn't it amazing that the invisibility of God, the glory of God, and the power of his being, which cannot be seen, has been imaged out and brought into revelation in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's one great thought of the apostles. And it's the central thought. This is the first aspect, the first perspective he gives us on the glory of Jesus.

[6 : 23] He is the image of the invisible God. But then, he sets them in his relationship not only to God, but to the whole of creation. Did you notice that too?

Because he goes on to say, by him were all things created. Or back to verse 15. As soon as he has said he is the image of the invisible God, he uses this strange word.

He says he is the firstborn of every creature. And you know, there have been times in the church when men have taken that beautiful thought and have made a heresy of it.

And they have thought that Paul was saying that Jesus was only a creature. But not someone. He is the only begotten. He is the first begotten Son of God.

That's how John puts it. And Paul says he is the firstborn. And there's a mystery there that we can't penetrate. Christ in his deity partakes of the eternity of God.

[7 : 30] And yet, he is the Son of God. He is the only begotten of God. And he is the first begotten of God. And his life is drawn somehow from the life of the Father.

There is a generation of the Son which has no beginning and which shall know no end. He is eternally generated by the Father. And yet, he is so different from all the creatures that by him everything was made that is made.

To use the words of John, it's the very same thought in Paul's mind here as we get in John chapter 1 verses 1 and 2. For by him were all things created.

Is Jesus your Saviour? Then, my friend, there is nothing in the world around you that was not created by his power and that did not come forth at his word.

Nothing. There is nothing in heaven that wasn't created by Jesus. And let me say this. There is nothing in hell that was not created by Jesus either.

[8 : 46] For all things were created by him. And if he is the creator and maker of these things, he must be in total and absolute control of them.

And he is. And things visible and things invisible. Whether they are thrones or dominions or principalities. And there, Paul seems to have in mind when he uses that phraseology, he seems to have in mind the powers that are resistant to God.

Remember how he says it to the Ephesians, we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and dominions and wickednesses in high places.

These are the things he's thinking of here. And they were all created by Jesus. They all are upheld by the word of his power. Now there's the glory of Christ.

Over against all created things he is their creator. And then third, a third fold, the third aspect of his glory is this, that he is the head of the church.

[9 : 54] in relation to God he's the invisible one. He images forth the invisible one. In relation to creation he brought it all into being and he sustains it in being.

And in relation to the church he's its king and its head. And among all those who have been born again of the Holy Spirit he is the firstborn.

He's the firstborn of every creature when it comes to creation. when it comes to redemption here again he is the firstborn from the dead.

Yes, he became like us in all things except our sin and he went down into death and took part of that which is the wages of sin.

And he says from heaven to us tonight I am he that lives and I became dead and behold I am alive forevermore and he's the firstborn from the dead.

[10 : 57] That itself would be very interesting for our sermon to probe the meaning of that but we're not going to do it tonight. That in all things whether it is in relation to God in the fullness of his deity or to creation in the immensity of its sweep or to the church in the grandeur of its redemption in all these fears his glory is supreme.

He is preeminent and his preeminence that preeminence finds an echo in our hearts if we love him. we are glad to crown him with every crown and make him king of everything.

Now in the midst of all this these wonderful powerful illuminating definitive descriptions of Jesus in the midst of them all Paul comes to the cross.

This is all leading up to that. Jesus in relation to God Jesus in relation to creation Jesus in relation to the church is suddenly linked to the cross.

It pleased the father in verse 19 he says that in him should all fullness dwell and having made peace through the blood of his cross. Isn't it amazing that we can take a phrase like that and attach it to the one of whom Paul has been speaking the blood of his cross.

[12 : 41] And then we see that the very one whom Paul has related so dynamically into the whole of the cosmos is related also equally dynamically into the whole of the chaos that sin has brought about within the cosmos.

The same one who created the same one who brought all beings and creatures and all things he's related not only to the first creation but to the recreation of all things.

He is the one the one who's at the heart of the whole process of bringing into being. He is the one who when things have been twisted and have gone wrong and the mystery of iniquity has been at work he is the one who then still is at the center of things bringing order and cosmic renewal into the chaos that sin had brought about.

You see he is not only the creator and sustainer and goal of creation but he is the redeemer and the reconciler and the restorer of creation.

And I can always remember how Professor Finlayson would touch on this in his lectures to us in systematic theology on Christ as the creator and on Christ as the redeemer he would say the wonderful thing about our salvation he would say is this that in the footsteps of the creator we can trace the footsteps of the redeemer and the one who makes all things new is the one who made all things new at the very beginning.

[14 : 47] Not a different God but the same God who is renewing all things in himself now it's time we'll get into our text doesn't it we've taken all that time to set it in order so we'll only be able to look at the outlines of it there is the one the cross planted in the midst of it all he is the Christ of the cross Christ himself the center of creation Christ and him crucified the center of recreation no salvation apart from him and this is what he says he's talking about reconciliation that's at the heart of recreation of the new creation reconciliation it's a lovely word and then he says you that sometimes were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works and there we're seeing the need of reconciliation we see that something had to be done in order to create and cement and to enable that friendship we were talking this morning that will be our first thought now the need of reconciliation then he goes on to point out the way of reconciliation you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works yet now has he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death through death and then he tells us the purpose of reconciliation to present you holy and it's lovely words isn't it holy and unblamable and unprovable in his sight now there's the to use the words we used this morning and there's the three lines our thought will follow very briefly we'll only be able to probe them just a little bit the need of reconciliation and this is put very powerfully may not seem so at first they may seem very ordinary words yet

I want you to look at them with me very carefully now there's a threefold aspect that about us that constitutes the need of reconciliation it's all in us the creatures we are by birth and nature and he uses three thoughts you he says that were sometime alienated and there's a very interesting word fascinating word now he's not just saying you who were aliens we would understand what that meant you who no longer belong to a certain set or a certain company or a certain nation or a certain kingdom but that's not what he's saying he's saying more than that he's looking behind the fact that they are aliens to the reality that made them aliens you see there's an action at the heart of the word he is using you who have been alienated and it's an action on the part of

God that has alienated them you have been alienated it means that they have been cut off from the friendship and the fellowship of God by God himself and the thought immediately leads to the sovereign action of God remember what God did when man sinned whereas he said put man out and he rose up and he put man out of the garden and man was alienated we have the same thought in the words of the Lord Jesus he said he that believeth not is condemned already alienated we're that when we come into the world you see now there's a sense in which we all know

I'm sure if we're hearers of the gospel that there's an aspect to reconciliation that there's an aspect of it which relates to the judgment of God a judicial aspect justification by faith which is part of reconciliation and the atoning death of Christ which is part of it they show us that there's a judgmental aspect a judicial aspect to reconciliation there is a judicial aspect to alienation also the judgmental activity of God lies at the heart of what Paul is saying here you have been alienated now let's take the word and give it a slightly different translation it's translated sometimes a stranger in the New Testament and Paul is saying to these people you were made to be strangers

God made you strangers to him my friend that's what you are tonight if you're unconverted you're a stranger to God he has alienated you from him and that has to be overcome before you ever be a friend alienated you see it means again in New Testament terms the loss of citizenship remember how Paul says to the Christian believers you're citizens of heaven well the same word here you've lost citizenship you're alienated you are strangers and that touches the personality in the whole of it it's a spiritual thing that's here and you know sin has cut us off from God alienated us spiritually from him and from his blessing and then

[21 : 43] Paul goes on to a second thing that is true of them and that points up the need for reconciliation because we have been spiritually strangered from God in this way he says we have become mentally at enmity with him we are enemies in our minds to him what does enmity mean it means warfare really it means that we're at war with God and my friend worse still it means that God is at war with us we're at war with God because he has exercised his lordship over us and because he has put us away from him we resent it and we rise up against it I doubt if there is any truth about God in the whole realm of revealed truth about him I doubt if there is one that so antagonises man as the truth that God is sovereign lord over all and that he may have mercy on whom he will have mercy and that whom he will he may harden you see men clench their teeth and become very angry when that's preached sometimes and it just brings out the enmity of men against

God the enmity of the mind oh you say no no no no I'm not an enemy of God God forbid that I you are my friend the very constitution and mindset that you have if you're not converted makes you an enemy of God let me try and illustrate that in this way by saying that your very mindset has made God your enemy he's at war with everything in you that is against him he's at war with your own willfulness he's at war with your pride he's at war with your selfishness he will not have it in any one of his children and he will not have you as his child until something is done about that enmity against him that's in your mind and which brings out his enmity and his condemnation listen to what the

Bible says about this God it says it's not me that's saying it's the Bible God is angry with the wicked every day and we forget that we think God is smiling and full of pleasure with everyone not so that's the God who's being painted by modern theology and modern preaching he's not the God of the Bible God is angry with the wicked every day God is at war with sin and God must from a necessity of his nature forever be at war with sin and he'll be at war with sin wherever he finds it and my friend bless God that it is so there will be no assurance of ultimate righteousness no assurance for us of ultimate peace no assurance for us of ultimate perfection and ultimate holiness were our God not so constituted that he must be at enmity with sin come with me to the cross where reconciliation was made and there you see that God and sin cannot dwell together and live and at the cross you see death in God because of sin death that spells out not the death of God but the death of sin the confining of it into the place which the

Bible says God has prepared for the devil and his angels if God is at war with sin and men are at war with him again something has to be done there's the need of reconciliation enmities in our minds that's the consequence of alienation but he doesn't even stop there that mental attitude and mental set which roots in spiritual alienation from God it expresses itself of course the inward man always expresses himself outwardly how does it express itself by wicked works you and I look around the world sometimes don't we we lift our daily daily not the daily it's better daily papers or we turn on our television and what do we have our news consists by large of our counting of the wicked works go to your

Monday papers tomorrow there'll have been murders in our cities men violently taking the lives of other men there's an expression of enmity and alienation which is terrible it's destroying man in whom is the image of God and then there are other times when we don't need to read our daily papers in order to be reminded of wicked works we sit down and we read our own hearts and we know wicked works we look back over our own way and we know wicked works there's the need of reconciliation begins in being alienated pushed out into the place of strangership and strangerhood by God resulting in enmity of the heart and the mind and then that whole expressing itself in ungodly ways we will not have this man to rule over us then Paul points us to the way of reconciliation he points us to

[27 : 55] Jesus the one whose glory he had been outlining and he says yet now has he reconciled us it's something which has been done and it's in the body of his flesh we don't have time to look at everything here so let me just concentrate on that phrase for a moment in the body of his flesh in the reality of his humanity and he doesn't say in his human body but in the body of his flesh Paul uses this word again and again uses it in Romans uses it in Corossians John uses it in John chapter 1 14 to speak of the incarnation of the Son of God he says the word was made flesh and dwelt among us he doesn't say the word was made man because flesh is a connotation of fallenness about it it has a connotation of our limitations because of sin about it and Christ became a real man and the

Bible wants to emphasise that he took everything which was ours in his humanity except our sin fullness he became a true man now it's not his becoming human that is the ground of reconciliation reconciliation doesn't rest in incarnation and there are those who teach that today the whole emphasis of much of what we hear broadcast or written about Christmas time when men's minds go to the incarnation the whole slant and emphasis of it today sadly is that this was the saving act of God God coming as a baby and that's all that had to be done no but in the body of his flesh through death the way of reconciliation was death for the son of

God God that he might taste death for every man what a thing sin is what a thing sin must be what a thing alienation and enmity against God must be for it demands it requires in order to remove it the death of one who is God now he takes human nature in order to die it is not open to God if I can put it by that purely as God it's not open to one who is the founder of life to experience death there is no such thing no such reality nor can there ever be any such reality as the death of God but there is such a reality as the death of God in Christ the person who experienced death and who came through death is an infinite passion he is the son of

God it wasn't just a human nature that died it was one whose human nature it was and that one was the son of God Paul looks at the cross and the one on it is truly man but he is also truly God you remember what Paul says when he looked at the cross he says he loved me but he doesn't stop there he says he gave himself for me there's the self giving of the son of God through the body of his flesh death takes place there's a separation of soul from body and death reigns in the passion of Jesus our short of calicism puts it very cogently it says that he remained under the power of death for a time the time must have been set out from eternity there is some kind of significance in it for three days and then we read that the bands of death could not hold him he arose again the way of reconciliation is through the death of

Christ go to second Corinthians chapter five that's where the doctrine of reconciliation is very fully elaborated that's where it's usually preached from that's where our ministers love to go when they're preaching on the doctrine of reconciliation and inductions and ordinations and things like that and we read this don't we that marvellous statement God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses to them he was doing something God was in it you can't separate God from the cross not even God the father nor God the spirit although the central one and the suffering one and the offering one is God the son but there we are God in Christ reconciling and let's come on to the last thought the purpose of reconciliation and that purpose itself brings out the nature of what reconciliation is and there are three things to present you holy holiness what is holiness holiness is just the converse the obverse the reverse of what sinfulness is holiness belongs ultimately only to

[34 : 21] God himself but it is something which belonging to God he can impart to man and he does it through the reconciliation of the cross the whole groundwork of the holiness which one day will belong to all the people of God has its roots its foundation here in the cross of Jesus that's what the cross is all about my friend that you might be holy that your life might be brought into conformity with Christ and obedience to Christ as the cross has that effect in your life and in mind to make us obedient they will do it ultimately there will be a total obedience when we are in heaven redeemed we will be holy and then he doesn't stop there and you know Paul's not just adding these words one after the other for the sake of rhetoric just as there was a differentiation and a meaning individualistic meaning in the words that spoke about alienation and enmity from God so there's a distinction and a differentiation in the words with which he speaks of our restoration and our coming back into the circle of fellowship and friendship and there's the basis of it holiness remember everything we said this morning and alongside it my friend like this without holiness no man shall see

God holiness must be at the heart of the friendship which is the fellowship of God with his people and the fellowship of his people with their God and then there's something else holiness might seem very far away from us here's something that comes very near to us unblamable what is it to be unblamable it means that no blame can be attached now when we've done something wrong we naturally immediately feel we're to blame any person can blame us over that thing and they blame us correctly and rightly and even if we deny it our minds our conscience our hearts tell us they're quite right we are blame worthy it's very closely related to our consciousness of guilt doesn't it and in the light of our sin we know that we're blame worthy we know that God can accuse us that Satan can accuse us that our sin can be brought out and we are to blame for it we're at fault we're guilty and if we're in Christ this reconciliation means not only a provision is made for our holiness but in the reconciliation all our blameworthiness has been taken away and when

Satan who is called the accuser of the brethren comes to accuse us and blame us in the presence of God we are as blameless as Christ himself one of the lovely things that scripture says about Christ is this that he is as a lamb without blemish blemish is a word very closely related to the word blame it means that Christ in his passion was without blame he was blameless men might blame him but the blame had nowhere to rest in him he was without blemish and every one of his children ultimately will be the same we can be accused and there is nowhere in us that the accusation can find a place to rest and better still we are without cause of blame in the eyes of God we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and then he brings in another thought which is very closely related still but just a little bit different unreprouvable what is it to be reprov'd it's to suffer the consequence of blame do you remember what it was when you did something wrong at school you got your boots torn or you got them dirty or you lost them on the road home or you didn't take them with you or something then the teacher took you out in front of the class and you were there and you were shaking in your boots and then you were blamed and then after you were blamed and found guilty whether you wanted to be or not you were reprov'd and sometimes the reprov'ing was sore than other times it's more than accusation it is the bringing home to us the reprov'ing of the punishment which fits our crime and here we are sinners who are worthy of condemnation and damnation hell deserving sinners who will stand in the presence of God not only unblameable but unreprouvable in whom now we could say in whom there is no reason or cause of punishment being inflicted they are unreprouvable you can't even rebuke them it would be too much isn't that lovely that's what reconciliation affects that's what the blood of the cross does that's what the saviour on the cross has done he has made peace through his blood and the heart of the peace between

God and his people peace which the blood has established the very heart of it is reconciliation the provision of holiness and I suppose that holiness in a sense means nearness to God holiness for those who are alienated blamelessness for those who are enemies you know it takes a long time before you stop blaming in your heart or your mind someone who has been your enemy doesn't and the moment all blame the blame you attach to someone who has wronged you the moment that all goes from your mind and away from your heart and every strand of bitterness with it then you know that reconciliation has taken place well in the place of enmity there is blamelessness and in the place of wicked works there is a soul and a life that cannot be reproved irreprovable that's what it is to be a child of

God that's what it is to be in Christ that's what it is my friend for those of whom it is true that the fellowship is with the father and with his son Jesus Christ they have been reconciled through the body of his flesh through death and they have been made holy and unblameable and unreprouvable they are children of God let us pray our gracious God we thank thee for our meditation in thy word this evening for the richness and the fullness with which thy word comes to us for the way it defines and describes not only our state but our experience in alienation from thee in guilt consciousness in sinfulness and we bless thee too that it describes and defines the reconciliation of the cross for us and we pray thee that in the measure in which we have probed it and beyond that measure we may be given understanding in our minds and the experience in our heart oh God grant that each one of us here this evening may no but