**Citizenship in Heaven**

**Philippians and Colossians – #23**

**The Letter to the Colossians 1:19-23**

**Reconciled with God**

***Colossians 1:19*** *In him all the fullness of divinity was pleased to dwell,* ***20*** *and through him to reconcile all things to him, making peace through the blood of his cross, through him, whether on earth or in earth or in heavens.* ***21*** *You also, who once were alienated and of hostile mind in evil deeds,* ***22*** *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh through death, in order to present you holy, blameless and irreproachable before him.* ***23*** *If indeed you continue in faith, firmly established and steadfast, and if you are never disused [abandoned] from the hope of the gospel which you have heard, which is proclaimed to every one (creature) under heaven, and of which I Paul, became a minister.”*

**The Theme of Reconciliation – A Survey**

Because of a long history of misunderstanding that God was our enemy and that Christ came to reconcile God with humanity, it is important to look carefully at the use of the different Greek verbs translated with one verb in English: to reconcile

**What does Colossians say?**

The work of Jesus is explicitly declared by the two actions: to reconcile and make peace. These two actions are the manifestation of the fullness of the divinity. We have to look at the verb “to reconcile” used here in Colossians 1:22 and in Ephesians 2:16. We also will look at Romans 5:10, 1 Corinthians 7:11, and 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

**Reconciliation in the NT**

1. The verb “to reconcile” – ***katallassw*** or κατήλλαξεν – was used in Colossians 1:22 as the work of God in Christ to reconcile the whole creation to God. But more important is to remember “making peace” by “the blood of his cross” which is more explicit of what is implicit.
2. Blood does not refer only to the death of Jesus but also to Jesus offering himself as a sacrifice (Rom 3:25; 1 Cor 11:25, Eph 2:13, Heb 10:19). If we look at Colossians 2:15, the blood is also that of a victory in a battle, “*He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it*.” So the cross is the mark of victory.
3. All things in heaven and on earth were reconciled to God by the blood of the cross. There is no reference here to anger of wrath.

**Reconciliation of God and Man.**

1. In the NT, it is only Paul who uses this verb “reconcile” of the relation between God and man, with ***katallassien*** used only of God, and ***katallgunai*** only of man. God reconciles us or the world to himself in 2 Corinthians 5:18ff. He is not reconciled, but God is the one who does this great active divine work. God is the one who takes the initiative. Paul does not say that God reconciled Himself to us or to the world but reconciled the world.
2. On the other hand, we are reconciled to God in Romans 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:20. But God and man are not on equal terms in relation to reconciliation. Reconciliation is not reciprocal in the sense that both equally become friends, where they were enemies. The supremacy of God over man is maintained in every respect.
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4. The use of ***katallassein*,** denotes a transformation or renewal of the relationship between God and man, and therewith of man’s own being. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-18: “*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away.* *See, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.*” Reconciliation is introduced as the basis of comprehensive renewal for humanity, namely, that we have become a new creature, that old things have passed away and that all things have become new.
5. In Romans 5:10, we see, “*For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life*.” Here reconciliation denotes an incisive change. Christ died for the ungodly (v.6), we still were sinners when Christ died for us (verse 8), but the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (verse 5). There is a change, not merely in the disposition of humanity or our legal relationship to God, but in the total state of our life. This change cannot be maintained that there has been any change of mind on the part of God, since His gracious will had been revealed long before even in the OT.

**Reconciliation and the Death of our Lord: Reconciliation and Justification**

1. We are reconciled by the death of Jesus (Rom 5:10). As Jesus was made a sacrifice for sin for us, we were made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21). In this context reconciliation is parallel to justification (cf. also Rom 5:10 in relation to 5:9). This is why we have the use of the word “reckoned,” which is vital to Paul’s view of justification (Rom 4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 23, 24). Please read carefully Romans 4:3-4 … ***3***  *“For what does the scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’* ***4*** *Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.”*  So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness irrespective of works. This also occurs again in 2 Corinthians 5:19: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. “Not counting” is the same in Greek as “not reckoning” their trespasses against them.
2. There can be no question that in reconciliation more takes place than a mere removal of guilt or sin. God has sent to humanity His messengers through whom God addresses us beseeching us for Christ’s sake: *“Be reconciled to God”* (2 Cor 5:20). Through the revelation of the infinite love of God that did not regard the sacrifice of the Son too great to hold it back but offered His Son because his love and for his love’s sake, humanity is called to be totally renewed. The love of Christ controls us, according to 2 Corinthians 5:14. We no longer live for ourselves, but for the One who died for us and was raised again (verse 15). We judge that we have died like all others but now we are new creatures.
3. By reconciliation our sinful self-seeking is overcome and the fellowship with God is created in Christ who is alone as the Living Christ is its source. Paul sees this as a new reality, which is revealed now (2 Cor 5:11-15). This is not part of a psychological treatment of our conscience. Paul in verses 11 and 12 shows that perception of these new realities is not a mere projection of faith but faith-perception led to love by the love of God. God’s action towards man is God’s gift and if man himself never ceases to be a sinner and carnal, nevertheless man is not the one who incited God to act but the divine reconciliation is God’s own work. Humanity is visited by the love of God and humanity is thus awakened to love.
4. This is particularly clear in Romans 5:5. God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. In us was poured out, or shed, like shedding blood so that the reconciled, the love of God, has become a present and active reality whereas previously we lived apart from it; we simply lived for ourselves. This has taken place through the Holy Spirit, who is given to us men (and women) who still live in the flesh. Thus both the old and the new are to be found in man. But if we consider human life in totality as has become new through the Spirit, the believer is enabled to walk in the Spirit (Rom 8:4).

**Are we active or passive in our reconciliation?**

1. It is often asked whether we are active or passive in reconciliation. The true answer is that we are made active. For the ministry of reconciliation has conveyed on us the loving action of God, God Himself makes us active, giving us both the right and the power to reconcile our life to God.

2. The two Greek verbs used for reconciliation, ***katallagumen and katallagentesare***, are undoubtedly to be taken in the passive voice. For example, in Romans 5:10 is: *“For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son.”* This is the same passive voice that is parallel to the passive voice “*we have been justified by his blood*” (verse 9) as also by the context, which speaks of the work of the Spirit towards us. So it is not of our action without God’s love. We have received reconciliation in such a way that God has besought us (2 Cor 5:20). Our activity is to ask for the acceptance of this gift. The fact that Paul speaks of “the logos (or the word) of reconciliation” as a request excludes any possibility of regarding humanity as merely passive in reconciliation. We have to act to accept.

3. God treats every human as a person and with love and respect to human freedom. It is only because we are persons that every human is active in reconciliation. Note the analogy between 2 Corinthians 5:20, “*So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God,*” and the use of ***apokatalassw****,* the reconciliation of husband and wife in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 *“To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband 11(but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife*.” This excludes any mere passivity on our side in reconciliation. The husband could not be enjoined on the wife if she were purely passive in relation to it. Even if she is not to attempt reconciliation, she must at least agree to the attempt of the husband. If she were purely passive, there could be no new fellowship, and therefore no reconciliation between herself and her husband,

**Reconciliation of the World**

1. Paul speaks of reconciliation as part of our personal confession of faith, that “we are reconciled” (Rom 5:9,10; 2 Cor 5:18). He refers to the reconciliation of the world only in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20, and even here the world is not opposed to the “we,” but represents precisely the same thing in its widest possible range. The world and we are reconciled, because, apart from reconciliation, we, too, are simply weak and sinful and ungodly, and reconciliation is ordained for all without restriction.
2. This is how Paul conceives of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19-20) as ongoing divine work. For he could hardly think of his own work as ministry of reconciliation if it was neither about a past action nor of the content of his message “Be reconciled,” if he believed that reconciliation was concluded in the death and resurrection of Jesus in such a way that what followed is no longer part of the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

1. Since the ministry of reconciliation has not yet come to an end, and the world has not yet heard the “*Logos, the word of reconciliation*” in all its members, reconciliation itself must not be thought of as concluded. Obviously there can be no question of any continuation or repetition of the death and the resurrection of Jesus, which is the only source of reconciliation, but the ministry of the divine messengers through whose work there is accomplished the renewal of the individuals who constitute the world, is the ongoing execution of reconciliation. “Our” reconciliation is concluded, and Paul can speak of it (Rom 5:9, 10; 2 Cor 5:18). But this is not so with the reconciliation of the world.

1. The phrase “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19) does not denote a concluded work: “*God was present to reconcile the world to Himself.*” When and where this work will be concluded is not brought under consideration here. For this reason, reconciliation for Paul consists exclusively not only in the removal of sin and guilt between us and God, but also in bringing the world as a whole to be new creation.
2. Paul does not say that the world is reconciled ‘because the world was seeking reconciliation,’ but that the reconciliation of the world has to be finished just like the return of the Jews to Christ. The reconciliation of both the world and the Jews has begun in the cross of Christ and the resurrection of both are in the course of fulfilment. We can call the world reconciled in the Pauline sense only as we anticipate the execution of that which is present in the purpose of God and in the foundation.

**Who was Hostile: God or Humans?**

1. The state of divine-human hostility which precedes reconciliation is not mentioned at all in 2 Corinthians 5, and if we read the whole presentation of Paul in Romans 5: 6ff, without reading in his words “Church Traditions,” we can’t conclude that God was our enemy but us who “were enemies.” (5:10)
2. God’s love and his wrath must be seen as one action going together at the same. Church Traditions misread Romans 1:18-32. Paul speaks quite plainly of the wrath of God that was known in the OT because in the OT that wrath was revealed in the Flood and other events. When Paul says using the present tense“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.” No new wrath was revealed at the coming of His Son, let alone at his death on the cross. Paul is clear that the death of his Son God “did this to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance God had passed over the sins previously committed (Rom 3:26). Indeed we can see the two sides of love and wrath but not as applied together in (Rom 11:28) Paul says that regarding the gospel, the Jews are enemies of God for our sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors this “they” is the same “they” who were called enemies of the gospel. Paul ascribes to man in relation to God a kind of alienation (2 Cor 5:l0), but in (Rom 8:7- 8) we are the hostile when set the mind on the flesh and become the cause of death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God) the essential expression of hostility to God is manifested in disobedience but this disobedience comes from the “the mind of the flesh”, which in (2 Cor 5:15) is called living to ourselves. The essential features of our state prior to reconciliation are:
3. Entanglement in a self-seeking which cannot fulfil the divine command of love (R. 8:7)
4. This kind of life brings divine displeasure (Rom 8:8), wrath, which is judgment on the Last Day.

**Christ as Our Life and as Our Substitute**

1. Reconciliation comes about through the death of Jesus (Rom 5:10), which is obviously not merely something which takes place to our advantage, nor simply the revelation of the love of God (Rom 5:8), but is the continuation of all that is “in Christ” as both the source and as our substitute (2 Cor 5:20). God who reconciles us to Himself is always at the same time the God who judges us. For this reason reconciliation includes justification both in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and in verse 19 “*in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.*” This kindling of love embraces more than the removal of sin and guilt in forgiveness (Rom 5:9, 10)
2. Paul alone uses the verbs for reconciliation the NT. These verbs, like the unique verb ***apokatallassw***,  is found only in Colossians and Ephesians. This verb was never used prior to Paul, so perhaps he coined it. Its meaning and use are essentially the same as those of ***katallassw***. A difference is that in addition to God or the fullness of the divinity of God in Jesus (Col 1:20), Christ is also the subject of this reconciliation that demanded the use of this verb (Col 1:22; Eph 2:16), whereas God alone is the subject of reconciliation and the use of the verb ***katallassw***, yet we don’t have two different theologies. In whatever verbs, God is never the object, but only humans. In (Col 1:22) also reconciliation is unmistakeably of God, since He is the subject of reconciliation in verse 20.

1. We humans needed reconciliation because on our side we have alienation and enmity (Col 1:22). This enmity does not consist in discord or mistrust. It is “in the mind by wicked works.” Reconciliation is addressed to us. Its purpose is that humans might stand free in the last judgment (Col 1:22). So, in Colossians 1:20, God’s gracious purpose, which God had demonstrated (verse 19) to reconcile the whole world to Himself; does not mention a reconciliation of the world that has been already concluded. Reconciliation cannot refer merely to the removal of a relationship of sin / guilt by God, since it is plainly it includes peace (Col 1:20 and Eph 2:15), and also a new creation in (Eph 2:15). Hence it is not something one-sided. It embraces the total life situation of humanity. It does not refer merely to sin alone but to peace and life. In Ephesians 2:16, reconciliation to God also brings reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, and in Colossians 1:20, the reconciliation of humans to God also carries with it that of supra terrestrial beings, the angels.
2. In Colossians 1:20, reconciliation has often been given a wider significance. It implies restoration of orderly, right and original relationships; the object is creaturely being rather than conscious creatures. Reconciliation will bring all things to Christ.

**Alienation**

“To estrange or alienate” were words used in the OT (LXX, Ps 58:3; Hos 9:10; Isa 1:4) that meant “they have estranged or alienated themselves.” In the NT, the word alienation occurs only in Colossians 1:21 and Ephesians 2:12 and 4:18. It denotes the state prior to

reconciliation. In all three passages, alienation applies only to this state. (Col 1:12: Eph 2:12) – “*remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world*.” And in Ephesians 4:18, “*They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.”*

The basic meanings of alienation are:

1. A life that has been “altered or changed.”

2. A life that has something that makes it odd to what is around it.

Appendix: On the use of one unique verb for reconciliation, διαλλάσσω, ***diallassw*** in the Gospel. In the NT it occurs only in Matthew 5:24): “*leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift*” Here it means “to reconcile” in the sense of seeing to it that the angry brother, who neither seeks nor envisages reconciliation (v. 23), renounces his enmity.

**Abba Philemon**

Brother George,

May the Lord who is our life in its weakness and in the strength give you his divine light so that you can see the great grace of the God the Father that was given to us that is the life, glory and power of his very Son.

Indeed we are reconciled to our Father who out of his love and for his love’s sake brought us to eternal communion with his life. This is not an idea that we have in our minds but is the life we have now in spite of our weakness and sinful mind we will have it in full in heaven.

Those who speak of God’s anger against us commit two great sins:

* The first is that God out of his wrath created us knowing that we will never be good but always sinners, but He then did not think even once what should He create us but after that He brings us face to face with his wrath. This is sick.
* Second is that old sin of paganism of which you yourself spoke to me long ago confirming that our ancestors worshiped their gods by offering sacrifices to them to please them.

During Lent I was praying, trying to see what is the pleasure of the Father in the death of His Son. As this idea was too much for me to keep pondering on it, I decided to give it up, but on my way to my cell the words of the St Paul shined in my heart, “*while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.*” I thanked the Lord who led me to know that the Father could not have sacrificed his Son for us because He had a need, but that we had the need to come to life through the vanquishing of death.

The Gospel is about life eternal not just the common belief of forgiveness.

Reconciliation is our re-institution to what we had and was lost just like the Prodigal son.

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***Pope’s Notes***

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