



Christmas Series

Colossians 1:15-23 (sermon will focus on verses 19-21)

December 5, 2021

Main Idea: Our joy at Christmas is rooted in the hope that Christ is reconciling all things to himself.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Highlight – What stands out?

1. Write down repeated words, phrases, and ideas. What do you notice coming up the most?
2. Is there anything surprising to you in this text? Or what ideas do you see here that you have never heard before?
3. What questions do you have about the text?
4. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this text? What is the role of Jesus the Son in this text? What is the role of God the Father in this text?
5. Now slow down and think about how Jesus Christ is talked about in this text. Write down as many truths about him as you can find.

Explain – What does this mean?

This text follows a progression. Verses 15-20 speak of the preeminence of Christ. First in all things, then in our lives. He reconciles himself to the world and all creation and does it personally as well. Let's do some contrasting here to see how Christ's preeminence brings joy at Christmas.

One key phrase that comes up a lot in these passages is "all things." This implies that what Christ reconciles is all encompassing. But we need to first see why he needed to reconcile all things.

DEFINE OUR TERMS: "TO BE RECONCILED" —VERB. TO BE OR BECOME RESTORED TO FAVORABLE OR FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH ANOTHER AFTER A PRESUMED WRONG.

1. Who is the offended party in Colossians 1:15-23? Who needs to be reconciled? How does that reconciliation come about?
2. Read Romans 5:12-21. What do these verses say about Adam and his role in our need to be reconciled? How does this compare and contrast with Colossians 1:15-23?
3. Paul says that Jesus is the "firstborn of all creation." Look up 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. Why does it matter that Jesus is the firstborn?

Apply – How does this change me?

Think about what was lost when Adam sinned and what Christ accomplishes in reconciling all things. Let's look at it from two angles: the world/creation and personally.

1. When Adam sinned, everything was impacted. But when Christ came, he began the process of ushering in the new creation. Look up Matthew 8:1-4, 28-34; 9:1-8, and Revelation 21:1-6. How is Christ undoing what was lost when Adam sinned in these verses?
2. There is also a personal component to our salvation. Look up Colossians 1:13-14. Think about your old way of life, how has God worked to transfer you from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Christ? How is he making you new?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. Think about the people in your life. Who needs to be reconciled to God? Spend some time right now praying for them and then make a plan to reach out to them this week.
2. Think about your work, life at home, and community involvement. How can you be an agent of reconciliation this week showing that Christ is reconciling the world to himself?

EXAMPLES OF GOD RESTORING ALL THINGS IN THE WORLD:

- FAITHFULNESS IN OUR WORK
- CARING FOR OUR NEIGHBORS
- RESPONDING IN KINDNESS TO OUR FAMILY MEMBERS
- FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER
- BRINGING ORDER TO THINGS THAT ARE CHAOTIC
- AND SO MUCH MORE!

Commentary¹

*This commentary section is particularly helpful in highlighting the realities of redemption in Christ. It also follows a helpful flow as you think about the reconciliation Christ provides both personally and for the entire creation/world.

Author: The Apostle Paul

1:14. Through Christ, God’s “Loved One,” Christians **have redemption, the forgiveness of sins**. The parallel passage (Eph. 1:7) adds “through His blood” (as do some mss.) here. “Redemption” (*apolytrōsin*) means “to rescue by ransom” (see the chart, “New Testament Words for Redemption,” at Mark 10:45), and

¹ Geisler, N. L. (1985). [Colossians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 672–675). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

“forgiveness” (*aphesin*) means “remission” by the Redeemer. This emancipation is enjoyed only because of the tremendous cost Christ paid on the cross (cf. Rom. 3:24–26).

D. Exaltation of Christ (1:15–20)

From Paul’s petition that the Colossians be enlightened about God’s redemptive working in their lives, he moved naturally into his epistle’s main emphasis—the exaltation and preeminence of Christ. In this paragraph (vv. 15–20) Paul mentioned seven unique characteristics of Christ, which fittingly qualify Him to have “the supremacy” (v. 18). Christ is: (1) the image of God, (2) the Firstborn over Creation, (3) Creator of the universe, (4) Head of the church, (5) Firstborn from the dead, (6) the fullness of God, and (7) the Reconciler of all things. No comparable listing of so many characteristics of Christ and His deity are found in any other Scripture passage. Christ is the supreme Sovereign of the universe!

1:15. First, Christ **is the image of the invisible God**. Besides the obvious meaning of likeness (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), “image” implies representation and manifestation. Like the head of a sovereign imprinted on a coin, so Christ is “the exact representation of [the Father’s] being” (Heb. 1:3). As Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Anyone who saw Christ, the visible manifestation of the invisible God, has thereby “seen” God indirectly. For “no one has ever seen God, but God the only Son ... has made Him known” (John 1:18). Paul wrote of the “invisible” God (1 Tim. 1:17), but Christ is the perfect visible representation and manifestation of that God. Though the word “image” (*eikōn*) does not always denote a perfect image (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7), the context here demands that understanding. Indeed, like the word “form” (*morphē*; trans. “nature” in Phil. 2:6–7), *eikōn* means the very substance or essential embodiment of something or someone. In Hebrews 10:1 “shadow” and “the very image” (*eikōn*), which is Christ, are contrasted (cf. Col. 2:17). So Christ’s supremacy is first shown in His relationship with God the Father. Christ is the perfect resemblance and representation of God.

Second, Christ’s supremacy is shown in His relationship to Creation. He is **the Firstborn over all Creation**. Though it is grammatically possible to translate this as “Firstborn *in* Creation,” the context makes this impossible for five reasons: (1) The whole point of the passage (and the book) is to show Christ’s superiority *over* all things. (2) Other statements about Christ in this passage (such as Creator of all [1:16], upholder of Creation [v. 17], etc.) clearly indicate His priority and superiority over Creation. (3) The “Firstborn” cannot be part of Creation if He created “all things.” One cannot create himself. (Jehovah’s Witnesses wrongly add the word “other” six times in this passage in their *New World Translation*. Thus they suggest that Christ created all other things after He was created! But the word “other” is not in the Gr.) (4) The “Firstborn” received worship of all the angels (Heb. 1:6), but creatures should not be

worshiped (Ex. 20:4–5). (5) The Greek word for “Firstborn” is *prōtotokos*. If Christ were the “first-created,” the Greek word would have been *prōtoktisis*.

“Firstborn” denotes two things of Christ: He preceded the whole Creation, and He is Sovereign over all Creation. In the Old Testament a firstborn child had not only priority of birth but also the dignity and superiority that went with it (cf. Ex. 13:2–15; Deut. 21:17). When Jesus declared Himself “the First” (*ho prōtos*; Rev. 1:17), He used a word that means “absolutely first.” “Firstborn” also implies sovereignty. The description “firstborn” was not a fairly common Old Testament designation of the Messiah-God. “I will also appoint Him My Firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:27). While this regal psalm refers to David, it also designates the Messiah, as seen in Revelation 1:5, where Christ is called “the Firstborn from the dead (cf. Col. 1:18) and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.” So “Firstborn” implies both Christ’s priority to all Creation (in time) and His sovereignty over all Creation (in rank).

1:16–17. The third characteristic of Christ is that **by Him all things were created**. In fact **all things were created by Him** (*di’ autou*, instrumental Cause) **and for Him** (*eis auton*, final Cause), and **in Him** (*en autō*) they **hold together** (He is the constituting or conserving Cause). Christ is not only the One through whom all things came to be, but also the One by whom they continue to exist. Two other New Testament verses parallel this description of Christ: “Through Him all things were made” (John 1:3), and Christ the Son is the One “through whom [the Father] made the universe” (Heb. 1:2). The Father, then, is the ultimate Source (efficient Cause), and the Son is the mediating Cause of the world. The Son was the “master Workman” of Creation, “the beginning (*archē*) of the Creation of God” (Rev. 3:14, NASB).

The Son’s Creation includes “all” **things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible**. These indicate the *entire* universe, both material and immaterial. The hierarchy of angelic beings—**thrones** (*thronoi*) **or powers** (*kyriotētes*) **or rulers** (*archai*) **or authorities** (*exousiai*)—indicate a highly organized dominion in the spirit world, a sphere in which the Colossians were engaged in the worship of angels (Col. 2:18) and over which Christ reigns supreme (cf. Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Phil. 2:9–10; Col. 2:10, 15).

1:18. Fourth, Christ **is the Head of the body, the church**. Besides being the Lord of the universe He is also the church’s Head (cf. Eph. 1:22–23; 5:23). The reference here is to the invisible or universal church into which all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit the moment they believe in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). This work of the Spirit began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1–2; 11:15–16). It is a special body in which there is “neither Jew nor Gentile” (Gal. 3:28) but a whole new creation of God (Eph. 2:15). The church is a “mystery ... which was not made known to men in other generations” (Eph. 3:4–5; cf. Rom. 16:25–26; Col. 1:26).

Fifth, Christ **is the Beginning** (*archē*) **and the Firstborn from among the dead** (cf. Rev. 1:5). Christ was the first to rise in an immortal body (1 Cor. 15:20), and as such He heads a whole new order as its Sovereign (cf. “Firstborn” in Col. 1:15). Also Christ’s resurrection marked His triumph over death (Heb. 2:14; 1 John

3:8). He was the “Firstfruits” of those who die (1 Cor. 15:20) since, unlike others, He rose never to die again. He “was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). So He continues to live “on the basis of the power of an indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16). All this is **so that in everything He might have the supremacy**. Christ is given first place over all Creation. He is preeminent. The same eternal *Logos* (John 1:1) who “became flesh” (John 1:14) and “humbled Himself” (Phil. 2:8) is now “exalted” by God the Father “to the highest place” and has been given “the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).

1:19. The sixth description of the exalted Christ is that **all God’s fullness dwell[s] in Him**. Later Paul wrote, “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (2:9). Colossians 1:19 is one of the most powerful descriptions of Christ’s deity in the New Testament (cf. Heb. 1:3). “Fullness” (*plērōma*), a key word in Colossians, is used in 1:19 and 2:9. (The verb *plēroō* is used in 1:9, 25; 2:10; and 4:17.) The noun means “completeness” and is used of a wide range of things including God’s being (Eph. 3:19), time (Gal. 4:4), and grace in Christ (John 1:16). This full and complete Deity is said to “dwell” (*katoikēsai*, “abide lastingly or permanently”) in Christ.

1:20. The seventh feature of Christ is that He is the Reconciler. Through Christ God will **reconcile to Himself all things**. The phrase “all things” is limited to good angels and redeemed people since only **things on earth** and **things in heaven** are mentioned. Things “under the earth” (Phil. 2:10) are not reconciled. On God’s restoring of nature, see comments on Romans 8:19–21; and on the reconciling of sinners, see comments on Romans 5:10–11 and 2 Corinthians 5:17–20. It is important to note that people are reconciled to God (“to Himself”) not that God is reconciled to people. For mankind has left God and needs to be brought back to Him. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 “reconciliation” was used by Paul in a judicial (vs. an actual) sense in which the whole “world” is made savable through Christ’s death. Paul spoke of “the many” (i.e., “those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace”) being “made righteous” through the Cross (Rom. 5:19). To make **peace through His blood** means to cause God’s enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21) to become, by faith, His friends and His children (cf. Eph. 2:11–19).

E. Reconciliation by Christ (1:21–23).

1:21. Having struck the note of reconciliation as the seventh characteristic of the exalted Christ, Paul then developed that theme. Reconciliation is necessary because people are **alienated** (“cut off, estranged”) **from** life and **God** (Eph. 2:12; 4:18). Before conversion the Colossian believers also **were enemies** or hostile to God **in** their **minds** as well as in their behavior, internally and externally. Sin begins in the heart (Matt. 5:27–28) and manifests itself in overt deeds (Gal. 5:19). (“In the sphere of your evil deeds” is better than NIV’s **because of your evil behavior**. People are not inwardly hostile vs. God because of their outward acts of sins; they commit sins because they are inwardly hostile.)

1:22. Reconciliation of sinners to God is **by Christ's physical body through death**. The Gnostic tendency of the Colossian heresy, with its Platonic orientation, denied both Christ's true humanity and His true deity. As John explained, it is necessary to confess "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2). Spirits cannot die, and "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). In order to redeem humans, Christ Himself must be truly human (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:17). Thus Christ's real physical body and death were necessary for man's salvation (cf. Rom. 7:4; Heb. 10:10).

The result of Christ's death is redemptive—**to present you holy in His sight**. This may mean judicially perfect as to a believer's position, or spiritually perfect as to his condition. Ultimately God envisions both for believers, and Christ's death is the basis for judicial justification (Rom. 3:21–26), progressive sanctification (Rom. 6–7), and even ultimate glorification (Rom. 8). As Paul wrote the Ephesians, "He chose us in Him before the Creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight" (Eph. 1:4). Christians are **without blemish** (*amōmous*; correctly translated "blameless" in Eph. 1:4 and Phil. 2:15; cf. "without ... blemish" in Eph. 5:27 and "without fault" in Jude 24) in Christ, and also are **free from accusation** (*anēnklētous*). This latter Greek word is used five times in the New Testament and only by Paul (here and in 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6–7). It connotes one who is unaccused, free from all charges. Satan is "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10, κῆν), but Christ is their "Advocate" (1 John 2:1, κῆν) or "Defense" (1 John 2:1, ΝΙΝ) before the Father. Therefore by the merits of Christ believers are free from every charge (cf. Rom. 8:33). In Christ the accused are unaccused and the condemned are freed.

1:23. This reconciliation in Christ comes only by an abiding faith—**if you continue in your faith**. The Colossians had a settled faith—**established** (i.e., "grounded" like a building on a strong foundation) **and firm** (*hedraioi*, "seated or settled"; cf. 1 Cor. 7:37; 15:58), so Paul did not doubt that they would continue. In fact he spoke of **the hope** (confident expectation) which this **gospel** of reconciliation provides not only to them but also to the whole world—**to every creature under heaven**. This is obviously a figure of speech indicating the universality of **the gospel** and its proclamation, not that every person on the globe heard Paul preach. In Acts 2:5 this phrase describes a wide range of people from various countries without including, for example, anyone from North or South America (cf. also Gen. 41:57; 1 Kings 10:24; Rom. 1:8).



Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Sunday School teacher to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Introduction

Icebreaker Question:

Icebreaker Question: What is Christmas about?

OR

When you think about Christmas joy, what comes to mind?

READ ENTIRE TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Highlight – What stands out?

1. Is there anything surprising to you in this text? Or what ideas do you see here that you have never heard before? **(This is an opportunity to highlight what stood out to your group during the sermon. Or during the reading of the text in the group time.)**
2. There are two key words/phrases that come up repeatedly in this text. **“All things”** and **“reconcile.”** How many times do you notice these words in the text?

Explain – What does this mean?

This passage in Colossians is the most popular in all of Colossians. Christ as the firstborn in all creation is referenced in other places in scripture. Let's look at why it's important. Have your group look up these verses. **What do these verses above say about Jesus' role in creation and in salvation?**

- **JOHN 1:1-18**
- **PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11**
- **HEBREWS 1:2-4**

In Adam, all things were subjected to sin, death, and decay. Christ is the Second Adam who does what the First Adam could not—reconcile the whole world to himself. **Have your group look up these verses to help explain what was lost in Adam and what was restored in Christ:**

- **GENESIS 3:16-19**
- **GENESIS 5:1-5**
- **ROMANS 8:18-25**

Apply – How do I live this out?

Look again at verse 21. This is who we used to be. How have you seen Christ reconcile you to himself? What “evil deeds” have you seen purged from your life and how have you seen Christ work to present you “holy and blameless” before him?

THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO MAYBE STOP AND HAVE SOMEONE IN YOUR CLASS (OR MULTIPLE PEOPLE) SHARE HOW CHRIST SAVED THEM.

PARTICULARLY RELATED TO CHRISTMAS, THIS TIME OF TESTIMONY CAN BE A REMINDER THAT CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT THE DAWNING OF THE NEW CREATION, AND OUR TRANSFORMED LIVES ARE PART OF THAT.

Think about your work, life at home, and community involvement. How can you be an agent of reconciliation this week showing that Christ is reconciling the world to himself?

EXAMPLES OF GOD RESTORING ALL THINGS IN THE WORLD:

- FAITHFULNESS IN OUR WORK
- CARING FOR OUR NEIGHBORS
- RESPONDING IN KINDNESS TO OUR FAMILY MEMBERS
- FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER
- CLEANING AND BRINGING ORDER TO THINGS

Respond – What’s my next step?

Have someone in your group look up this verse and ask this question: “How can I be part of the ministry of reconciliation today, this week, or this Christmas season?”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21

Who do I share the gospel with? **This could be a space for group prayer time about the people in our lives who need this reconciliation in Christ.**

Additional Resources:

Additional Reading: Taken from *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* by Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, pages 215-216.

“The biblical story is about what God is doing in the world: working toward the renewal of the whole creation. God chooses people to join with him and participating on his work...Today, we too are invited to participate in what God

is doing...When God promises to make Abraham a great nation and bless all nations through him (Gen. 12:1-3), that promise must be seen against the backdrop of Genesis 1-11, which narrates God's creation of the world and the devastating effects of sin on it...Salvation is not an escape from creational life into 'spiritual' existence: it is the restoration of God's rule over creation and all of human life. Neither is salvation merely the restoration of a personal relationship with God, important as that is. Salvation goes further: it is the restoration of the whole life of humankind and ultimately of the nonhuman creation as all. This is the scope of biblical salvation. It is also the scope of our own calling to be witnesses of that salvation, to continue the mission of Jesus, who prayed for the coming of God's kingdom."

Song: [Come Behold The Wondrous Mystery](#)

Come behold the wondrous mystery
In the dawning of the King
He the theme of heaven's praises
Robed in frail humanity

In our longing, in our darkness
Now the light of life has come
Look to Christ, who condescended
Took on flesh to ransom us

Come behold the wondrous mystery
He the perfect Son of Man
In His living, in His suffering
Never trace nor stain of sin

See the true and better Adam
Come to save the hell-bound man
Christ the great and sure fulfillment
Of the law; in Him we stand

Come behold the wondrous mystery
Christ the Lord upon the tree
In the stead of ruined sinners
Hangs the Lamb in victory

See the price of our redemption
See the Father's plan unfold
Bringing many sons to glory
Grace unmeasured, love untold

Come behold the wondrous mystery
Slain by death the God of life
But no grave could e'er restrain Him
Praise the Lord; He is alive!

What a foretaste of deliverance
How unwavering our hope
Christ in power resurrected
As we will be when he comes

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