

Reconciliation

Good morning everyone, if I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor in training here at City Church. I know I'm up here pretty often with my wife Sara, but I'm not usually doing this, so if you think it's weird to see me without a guitar, I give you permission to feel that way because I feel kind of weird without one.

We're going to start off today in Colossians 1, so if you want to, go ahead and turn there in your bibles if you have them. If you don't have a bible, there should be a few at the end of your row that I'm sure someone would be willing to pass down. If you're using one of our bibles, we'll be on page 572 so feel free to turn there, we'll land there in just a minute. But before we get there, a little bit about me: My parents were missionaries, so I grew up in Kathmandu, Nepal, which if you don't know where that is, that makes sense because it's pretty tiny. For quick context, it's sandwiched right between India and China. It's where Mt. Everest is, so if you've ever seen *Monsters Inc.* and remember the scene with the yeti, you've basically been there. If you've ever met a missionary kid you might know this, but we have a reputation for being pretty weird. If you know me I'll let you decide how true it is in this context, and if you don't I'll just go ahead and let you know it's definitely true.

So as a reminder, we're working our way through a series leading up to Easter and looking at the events leading up to and on the cross from several theological angles to get a full picture of what happened and what was accomplished. Two weeks ago we talked about *redemption*: the idea that *we were enslaved to the power of sin, and Jesus brought us out.* Last week we learned about *justification*: that *we were guilty because of our sin, and Jesus declared us righteous.* Today we are digging into the idea of **reconciliation**. Reconciliation in a sentence could be phrased as: **we were alienated because of our sin, and Jesus restored us.**

Let me set this up by showing you just two verses in Colossians 1. We'll start there, then spend some time unpacking why exactly we *need* reconciliation, and then we'll circle back around to this verse in its greater context. But here's where we will start. Colossians 1, v. 19-20:

*[19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and **through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.***

So what we see very clearly in those two verses is that **one piece of what the cross was all about, was God "reconciling to himself all things."** That's what those verses just told us: there was something about Jesus dying on the cross that accomplished the *reconciliation* of "all things." Now to get at what is meant by all that, we're probably going to need to know what these "all things" are. Because the belief here is that "all things" once worked in a certain way. But the fact that they are in need of reconciliation means that on some level, they *aren't* functioning in that way. That'd be the only way that statement would make sense.

And that right there is a statement that I think we can all get on board with: that things on planet earth aren't as they should be. If you want to have some fun sometime, ask some different people you know this question: "what is wrong with the world?" And ask it to a lot of different types people: different political leanings, different socioeconomic statuses, different backgrounds, different races. Just take a

sampling of what different people say when you ask them what is wrong with the world. I bet you'll get a lot of different answers. Some people will say education. Some will say government. Some will say the *lack of* government. Some will say *religion* is the problem. Some will say tolerance, acceptance. You'll get a whole host of different answers. But you know one answer I bet you *won't* get? I bet *nobody*, when you ask them "what is wrong with the world," will say "nothing. Things in the world sure to seem to be clicking on all cylinders to me!" Nobody will say that. Because things aren't that way. And the way the bible would explain that is by saying that things are *broken*, and they need to be *reconciled*, or put back together. So we all know the world is broken, and we all know it needs to be put back together. What we are going to get into today is an in-depth description of the problem, and an in-depth explanation of how Jesus' death on the cross set into motion the solution.

So we're going to circle back around to the rest of this passage. But here's what I want us to do first. I want us to try and wrap our minds around what Paul means by the phrase "all things." When Paul says "all things" are in need of reconciliation, what is he referring to? What are the things that Jesus came to reconcile? I think it's helpful to break the term "all things" into four relationships. From the bible's perspective, there are four relationships that have broken down as a result of sin. And those relationships breaking down has caused most all of the brokenness in the world around us. The relationships that sin has broken are the same four relationships Jesus died to help reconcile back together. So let's talk about what those four relationships are exactly:

Relationship with God

The first relationship that is broken is our relationship with *God*. We discover this very plainly in passages like Isaiah 59:2:

*...but your iniquities have made a **separation between you and your God**, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

Any time *sin* occurs, there is a breach in relationship that results from it. Whether we've recognized it or not, we've all actually seen this happen. If you sin against somebody, things at least get a little awkward with them afterwards—if not outright antagonistic. For example, when I was in ninth grade, some friends of mine and I decided we wanted to start a band. Standard we-think-we're-jaded-and-deep-with-our-terrible-music high school stuff. While we were talking through who should be in the band and what instruments we wanted, one of the main guys brought up a kid in our class named Ebenezer. Side note: how many people have you met named Ebenezer outside of Christmas productions? Anyways, Ebenezer played violin and my friend asked if we wanted him in the band. I ever so tactfully responded by saying, "no Zach, he sounds terrible when he plays." Which was a sinful jab at Ebenezer, which I didn't really think about until Ebenezer chimed in behind me and said "thanks a lot, Eric." Needless to say, the dynamic of our relationship changed after that and for the rest of the school year the only conversations we had were...let's describe them as colorful and leave it at that. But that's what sin does, it breaks relationship. When you sin against someone, there is a breach, a chasm in the relationship between you and them. So the Scriptures tell us that since all sin is a sin against God, there is a broken relationship between us and him as a result of it. We see this in the very opening pages of the bible. Adam and Eve sin against God, and immediately they *hide* from him. They

go from perfect, peaceful, unhindered relationship with him to being suspicious of him and even scared of him.

Now, this broken relationship works itself out practically in a few different ways. For some of us, it looks like Adam and Eve in Genesis—we become *fearful* of God. We live in a constant fear of God and what he might do or how he might relate to us. Maybe we wouldn't call it that, but we find ourselves constantly wondering if God is going to lash out by causing the circumstances in our life to go haywire. We lose our job and we assume that's payback for something we did wrong. We fail a test, or get broken up with, passed up for a promotion, and think that's God punishing us.

For others of us, our broken relationship with God takes the form of performancism and religion. And by that, I mean that we turn our relationship with God into a transaction where we just live up to all the rules, and as a result, our expectation is that he blesses us for it. We operate as if God's affections and interactions with us are dependent about how well we perform for him.

For others still, a broken relationship with God looks like rejecting God or rebelling against him. We run as hard and as fast away from God because we don't want to bring ourselves under what he says is true and good and right.

Could look a lot of different ways, but the first relationship that sin breaks is our relationship to God.

Relationship with Self

Next up, our sin distorts our relationship with *ourselves*. We were created to discover and understand who we are via our relationship with God, but **since our relationship with him is broken, the way we understand and see ourselves is broken now too**. The prophet Jeremiah's famous words come to mind from Jeremiah 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

So part of the way our relationship with ourselves is broken, is that *we don't know what's going on in here half the time*. Disney says "follow our heart." The bible says "*don't follow your heart—that thing is like a busted GPS. Half the time you'll end up driving around in circles.*" Part of what sin has done is that it has sabotaged our ability to understand and see ourselves accurately.

One way this shows up is through a little thing I've heard some people struggle with, but definitely not something *I've* ever experienced, called *pride*. Not seeing ourselves accurately gives us an *inflated* view of ourselves. Take a look at Romans 12 with me:

*[3] For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think**, but to think with **sober judgment**, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

So apparently there is a way to see yourself inaccurately, even as a follower of Jesus. Paul here is writing to followers of Jesus in the Roman church, and he says “the temptation is to think of yourself too highly—instead, you should think of yourself with *sober judgment*.”

But it can also go the other way. Some of us think, not too highly of ourselves, but too low. Like we mentioned last week, some of us have embraced identities—at least internally—like “worthless” or “ruined” or “unloveable.” These ways of thinking about ourselves are *also* rooted in a broken relationship with ourselves. Because the bible would tell us that each of us are made in the image of God and therefore worthy of dignity, respect, affection. But sin causes us to reject that reality and instead embrace much lesser identities over ourselves.

There are plenty of ways this plays out in our lives practically, but in a number of different ways, our relationship to ourselves, our understanding of ourselves is now broken.

Relationship with Others

Third, sin breaks relationship between us and other *people*. This one doesn’t take a ton of convincing. If you’ve ever been in conflict with another person or witnessed drama between other people, you know how this works. We see this so clearly in the very first human relationship in the beginning pages of the Bible when Adam and Eve sin. They immediately resort to blame shifting and finger pointing and even hiding themselves from each other when they were in perfect relationship before. Sin *breaks* our relationship with others.

For one, when there’s conflict with other people, sin causes us to assume the *best* of ourselves, and assume the *worst* of others. So often we are quick to be offended at someone else’s actions, but very slow to examine what might have been wrong about our own. Sin makes us *self-oriented*, to where we treat every minor inconvenience others might cause as a deliberate offense.

Sin also makes us *envy* one another. Instead of seeing a friend of ours or somebody we know and celebrating with them because something good happened in their life, sin makes us ask, almost instinctively, “why didn’t that happen for me?” “Why do they deserve that more than I do?” If you’re single and one of your single friends gets engaged or married, instead of just thinking “I’m so glad that happened for them, it’s great that they’re getting married,” we sometimes think things like “why are they getting married and not me?” We think things like, “why did he get that promotion?” “Why did she get that raise? I deserve that more.”

Sin also sometimes makes us more *guarded* around others than we need to be. We easily go into self-protection mode, and refuse to let others know what’s really going on with us, which creates relational distance towards us and other people.

Relationship with Creation

Lastly, sin breaks our relationship with *creation itself*. Now, let me forewarn you: this is probably the part of today’s teaching that most of us think about the *least*. But the bible makes it clear that another relationship broken by sin is our relationship with *creation itself*.

Let me show you where I get that. Take a look on the screen at Genesis 3, starting in v. 17:

And to Adam he [that's God] said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'—

Now, let me just summarize what was just said. God basically just means "because you and your wife sinned." That's what he's talking about. Guys in the room, if you thought that verse was justification for not listening to your wife, you are bible-ing the wrong way. Bible better than that. He's saying, "because you sinned..."

*cursed is the **ground** because of you; in **pain** you shall eat of it all the days of your life; **thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you**; and you shall eat the plants of the field.*

Interesting. So as a result of sin entering the human story, Adam's relationship with the *ground* is affected. So **sin doesn't just impact our relationship with God, it doesn't just affect our relationship with ourselves and each other—it actually impacts our relationship with creation itself.**

One specific way that Genesis 3 says that happens is in our relationship to *work*. Adam's job was to work the *ground*, and God says that sin has now cursed his relationship *to the* ground. Work was supposed to be natural. It was supposed to come easy. Work was supposed to...well, *work*. But sin means work is now *difficult*. Work is now harder than it should be (and all God's people said? "Amen.") Work *doesn't* just work the way it's supposed to anymore. Sin means our work is filled with frustration and and fatigue and burn-out. It's consumed with red tape and restrictive regulations and inefficiency and workplace inequality. It's filled with back-stabbing and elbow-throwing and workplace gossip. Everything about work is now harder than it has to be. That in part, is because our relationship with creation has been *broken*.

But it doesn't stop there—our relationship with creation is broken in other ways too. Romans 8 hints at the fact that this is why sickness exists, why disease exists, why natural disasters happen—why creation itself doesn't seem to function the way it should. That passage says that all of creation is *groaning*—that creation itself is longing for the day that even it is put back to the way it should be. So there is something about the existence of sin that has disrupted the very fabric of creation. Things in our world *in general* do not work as they are supposed to work. One day the earth will be set free from all that. But as it stands, right now, the *earth itself* is *worse off* because of the presence of sin. Our sin has actually broken our relationship with the *earth*.

Now at this point, I feel like I need to clarify just one thing: *I'm not going full hippy on you*. As soon as you say something like "our relationship with the earth is broken," people tend to think you're about to bust out your incense and hemp necklace. I was joking with Kent that I feel like people are going to remember me as the "hippy sermon guy." But the bible makes it very clear, in passages like Genesis 3 and Romans 8, and others, that sin actually has a negative impact on *creation itself*.

Here's one easy example of this that I don't think requires you being on any particular side of the political aisle to get on board with. One of the impacts of sin is that you and I spend too much money buying things we don't actually need. The bible would call this greed, we might call it something like

“materialism.” Sin means we buy too much stuff. Now, all that stuff comes in packaging. Most of that packaging eventually becomes trash. And when millions of Americans buy more stuff than they need, that creates trash that fills entire landfills. Sometimes landfills just pile up and pile up, sometimes the trash eventually gets burned up. Now, you can agree or disagree as to whether stuff like that causes climate change or not. But I don’t know that *anybody* is out there making the case that miles and miles of trash on planet earth is *good* for the environment. Or for the people that live nearby, or for the people who drink the water near there. You don’t have to be on any particular side of the aisle to agree with that. So **what’s happening there is that our sin has actually negatively impacted our relationship to creation itself.** Am I making sense?

So in summary, what we’ve seen is that **sin not only affects our relationship with God, but also our relationship to ourselves, others, and creation.** But it all finds its root in our broken relationship to *God*. The reason our relationship with ourselves is broken is because our relationship with *God* is broken. The reason our relationship with others is broken is because our relationship with *God* is broken. And the reason our relationship with *creation* is broken is because our relationship *God* is broken.

So if something is going to be done about all these other broken relationships, something must first be done about our broken relationship with *God himself*. And God is the only one who can pull that off. So with all that background in mind, let’s take a look back at our passage in Colossians 1, starting this time up in v. 15:

*[15] He [meaning, “Jesus”] is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn of all creation.** [16] For by him all things were **created**, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things were created through him and for him.** [17] And he is before all things, and **in him all things hold together.** [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the **beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.***

Okay so very often in the bible, when the biblical authors want to emphasize something, they’ll repeat it. And in case you didn’t notice, there was a phrase that God repeated over and over again in that passage. It’s the phrase “all things.” Four times in four verses, Paul used the word translated “all things.” So he’s trying to make sure we see something. Jesus is the only one that can do something about our relationship to “all things.” By him all things were *created*, all things were created *through* him and *for* him, and in him all things *hold together*. In other words, if somebody is going to do something about our relationship to “all things,” Jesus is the guy for the job. So what does he do? Take a look continuing in v. 19:

*[19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, **making peace by the blood of his cross.***

What God did was send Jesus to the cross to accomplish the reconciliation of all things. But what did that have to do with anything? Well, remember, the primary relationship that is broken—the one that leads to all the other broken relationships—is *our* relationship with *God*. For the other relationships to be reconciled, that one has to be reconciled first. And that’s precisely where Paul goes next, v. 21:

[21] And you, who once were **alienated** and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, [22] he has now **reconciled in his body of flesh by his death**, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...

“Alienated” is the language used to describe our relationship to God due to sin. You could translate that “estranged” or “separated” from. Our sin has created a relational separation between us and God. And just like with any relational conflict, something must be done about it. Have you ever had someone wrong you in some significant way, and then they try to hang out with you like everything is completely normal? Doesn’t it just make you want to smack them? No just kidding, none of us would do that—especially me. But isn’t it infuriating? Yeah, that’s because that’s not how healthy relationships are restored. You don’t just pretend like everything’s okay when it’s not. Something must be done about the wrong. Even if the wrong is forgiven, that means that someone in the relationship is absorbing the cost of forgiveness into themselves.

So if we are going to be reconciled to God, something must be done about the wrongs we’ve committed. They must be absorbed. So here’s what Jesus did to absorb them: he *died*. He poured out his life on the cross and absorbed the cost of the wrongs we were guilty of—we’ll talk about that more this Friday. But in doing that, he made a way for us to be back in right relationship with God. He did something about the damage that we caused, he did something about the broken relationship we generated, and he brought us back into that relationship by his death. Part of what was *finished* on the cross was our *reconciliation*.

So as a result, we no longer relate to God based on fear, because, in the words of 1 John, perfect love *casts out* fear. We no longer relate to God based on performancism and religion, because in Paul’s language here in Colossians 1, God now sees us as “holy and blameless and above reproach” because of Jesus. God has reconciled our relationship with him.

And in light of *that*, the cross also makes a way for our other relationships to be set right as well. If our *broken* relationship with God led to other *broken* relationships, then our *reconciled* relationship with God means *reconciled* relationship with the other areas as well. He restores our relationship to ourselves. Through the Spirit, he gives us the ability to see ourselves more clearly. We all of a sudden have eyes to see things about ourselves that we didn’t or wouldn’t see beforehand. And even the ways we still can’t see ourselves clearly, God gives us other followers of Jesus to help us. We no longer think of ourselves more highly than we should, but we see ourselves with sober judgment. We no longer think of ourselves too lowly, because we understand that we are seen as righteous and acceptable in God’s sight.

In the same way, the cross makes a way for relationships with *others* to be reconciled. We no longer assume the best of ourselves and the worst of others, because we understand that we have blind spots. We no longer envy one another, because we are able to rejoice with those who rejoice—we’re able to *celebrate* when other people’s lives go well. We no longer live out of a mode of self-protection. Because we have a new identity in Jesus, we can open ourselves up to love and be loved, because we know that Jesus will be enough to get us through it.

And lastly, God restores our relationship with creation. God gives us the ability to fight through the frustration that is work. He gives the ability to live free from consumerism and materialism. And one day, the Scriptures promise that God will set right our relationship to creation once and for all. In Romans 8, it

talks about creation being “liberated from its bondage.” Acts 3 talks about “the time for restoring all things.” Isaiah 65 says God will “create a new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

So what we’re left with is the question, “what does all of this look like for us in the here and now?” What does it look like for us to live today in light of all of these reconciled relationships? It means when we sin, we don’t need to run away from God. We run to the one that reconciled us to him. When we sin against one another, we don’t shy away from those relationships, we can reconcile to one another because Jesus made a way. When we have a broken view of ourselves, we can let other followers of Jesus in to speak truth into our lives through encouragement and loving correction. And it means we can actively pursue the idea of things being “on earth as it is in Heaven,” knowing that God will ultimately restore creation to what it was intended and we can be a part of actively pursuing that end in our daily lives.

So through the cross, Jesus reconciles us to God, he reconciles us to ourselves, to others, and to creation. That’s what reconciliation means for us as followers of Jesus.

Let’s pray.