

Introduction

Good morning! You may be aware that Pastor Scott and Pastor Nathan were away at Shepherds' Conference last week. It is wonderful that they had that time together, and I hope that they were blessed by the preaching there. I feel very blessed to have this opportunity to preach because of their time away.

This morning I want to bring you a message titled "Reconciling Love"
"Reconciling Love."

A couple of years ago on the way home from work I saw something that I don't think I'll ever forget, because it made me really think through how God relates to people and how we should communicate the gospel.

I had taken the off ramp from I-5 into Woodland and I was sitting at the light when I saw a group of people with signs promoting a church event coming up that weekend. One of the signs in huge letters simply read, "GOD LOVES YOU!"

My immediate thought was: *That is probably the most irresponsible and dangerous message a church could proclaim indiscriminately on the side of a freeway offramp.* And then my next thought was: *The trouble is, it's true...in a sense.* It's true in one sense, but misleading and dangerous in the one sense that really matters to the lost.

And listen, I realize that a sign only has so much room for a message, and I realize that the person holding the sign was well intentioned. However, it made me realize that it's not only important to speak truth about God, but it's critical that we speak the truth in order to be understood by the hearers. Because the world is terribly confused about God's love.

When people hear that "God loves them", or that "God is love" they don't hear a biblical message. They hear this:

- God adores me
- God delights in me
- God accepts me

- God is for me
- God thinks very highly of me
- God and I are on good terms

Really what they hear is, “I have peace with God.” And brothers and sisters in Christ, we know that the opposite is true. They don’t have peace with God.

Look with me briefly at our text this morning. Colossians 1:21: **21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds...** Stop there.

Every person either was at one time, or currently is, alienated from God and hostile toward Him.

To be alienated from God speaks of our relationship with Him or rather our lack of relationship. To be alienated is to be estranged from Him - separated. The verse says we were hostile in mind toward Him. We made Him our enemy. How? Through our evil deeds. Through sin. And this has been going on since the first sin - Adam’s sin - or what is referred to as “the fall”.

Take your minds back to the beginning of creation. Let’s remind ourselves how this hostility started and what the consequences have been. When God finished creating the universe, Genesis 1:31 says this: **And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.**

God was pleased with His work. All of creation was in harmony with Him. Man and God were at peace with one another. Not only that, but think about the peace Adam had. He had peace within himself - not yet knowing good and evil. Scripture says he was naked, yet not ashamed. He had peace with Eve, and peace with nature - the animals and the garden. There was no conflict in his life...until he rebelled against God’s command and ate from the tree which God told him not to eat from.

The first evil deed. The first act of rebellion. The first sin against God. It was man that entered into war with God, not the other way around.

I think we can downplay the seriousness of what happened in the Garden if we’re

not careful. We can almost wonder why a good, righteous, and holy God reacted so harshly, but that's the wrong way to think of it. It was precisely BECAUSE God is perfectly good, perfectly righteous, and perfectly holy that He reacted the way He did. God is the perfect judge. If we want to know how seriously God views sin, we should look at the consequences God gave for Adam and Eve's rebellion.

1. Pain in childbearing - Very serious. To bring forth a child into this world, a woman has to "go to war" so to speak. Kelli and I have five children. After each of their births she has told me that she never wants to go through that again.
2. Lack of peace between man and wife - God told Eve, "**Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.**" (Gen 3:16b) I've never personally experienced this, but I hear it can be very difficult. :)
3. Creation itself was corrupted. Romans 8:20 says: **...the creation was subjected to futility...** This is a huge topic in itself. The ground was cursed so that it brings forth thistles and thorns. Man must go to war with the ground to make it produce a crop. Consider the way animals became wild and dangerous to man. Think of poisonous plant life. Consider the topic that has dominated the news cycle for the last few weeks - Coronavirus. Nature is at war with man.
4. Sin spread to all men. Every single person ever born is a sinner from conception. Romans 5:19 says: **...by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners...**
5. Death spread to all men. Every single person ever born is subject to death because of Adam's sin. Listen to what Romans 5:12 says: **...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men...**

All of these consequences.... All of these conflicts.... All of these things that are contrary to us - are symptomatic of man's fundamental problem: God is at war with man.

Isn't it interesting that natural man can discern the symptoms of The Fall, but he cannot discern the cause. He is blind to it. That is why people can live in a world where children die, where cancer reigns, where people starve, and they are

oblivious that all of these things point to the fact that God is their enemy on account of sin. They can live out their days on this earth with dread, fearing all these things that are contrary to them, and at the same time, live with no fear of the One from whom the curse came.

Proverbs 1:7 says, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”**

Until a person has come to understand that God is to be feared, they have not even started on the path of knowledge. So do you see why it’s a problem to stand on the side of an offramp with a sign that reads, “GOD LOVES YOU?” How will unbelievers come to fear the Lord when believers only want to talk about how much God loves them?

Listen, there is a sense in which God loves all people - even His enemies, but it is temporal. Its benefits only touch this life. Do you want to know how God loves the lost?

- Though they are not thankful, He rains down blessings upon them. Matthew 5:45 says, **“For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”**
- Though they’ve earned His judgement, He mercifully allows them to live.
- Though they’ve provoked Him to wrath, He takes no pleasure in their death.
- Though they refuse to listen, God warns them of their fate and calls them to repentance.

All of those things are true - they are true because God IS loving, longsuffering, and merciful - but God is also holy, just, and righteous. And though He temporally loves all people, He will eternally judge all people who refuse to repent.

Listen to the strong and terrifying language God’s word has for those who will not turn from their sin.

Psalm 7:12-13

12 If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword;

**he has bent and readied his bow;
13 he has prepared for him his deadly weapons,
making his arrows fiery shafts.**

If you refuse to repent of your sin, you need to know that God is sharpening His sword, so to speak. He is readying His deadly weapons against you. This is figurative language meant to convey the fact that judgement is coming. There will be a day of reckoning.

The world's notion that God loves everyone, and therefore God accepts everyone, and God will forgive everyone, is a terribly shallow and man-exalting falsehood. It hides the depths of the beauty and magnificence of the true reality of God's love for the world that was demonstrated at the cross.

With that as the introduction, let us look at our text this morning.

Colossians 1:19 & 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.

That brings me to the first lesson on your bulletins.

The reconciliation of all things...

(Lesson 1) required the life of Christ.

We will deal with just what "all things" means a little later, but first I want to focus on the cost God paid to end the war with man.

I want you to think about human conflict for a moment. Think about how men achieve peace with men. It is often the shedding of blood or the threat of bloodshed that brings peace among men. Men go to war - the idea being that at some point there will be peace when the enemy is defeated. Men protect their families - if someone were to break into any of your homes, I'm sure you'd do what it takes to

keep your family safe. The point is, men can achieve peace by bloodshed, but what can't they achieve? They can't achieve reconciliation through bloodshed.

Peace and reconciliation are not the same thing. Peace can be uneasy. Peace can be very fragile. Peace can even exist among enemies, humanly speaking, if the threat of war is enough of a deterrent. That is the entire basis for the military doctrine of *Mutually Assured Destruction*. We have enough nuclear weapons to destroy our enemies, and our enemies have enough nuclear weapons to destroy us. The threat of bloodshed on that scale is enough of a deterrent to create a peace of sorts - albeit a tense and uneasy peace.

Not so with God. When God made peace by bloodshed, He not only achieved peace between God and man, but He achieved something infinitely greater - He achieved reconciliation. Understanding what it means to be reconciled to God is critical.

Reconciliation describes how God takes a sinner - His enemy - and makes them His beloved friend.

You see, God could have peace - He could end the conflict with man - by destroying man completely. In fact, He came very close to doing so in the past, when he flooded the earth. It is His love that stays His hand from total destruction. It was His love that prompted Him to send a savior, as it were, in the form of an ark to save Noah and his family. It is His love that prompted Him to send the true and greater savior - Jesus Christ.

Friends, you will never understand God's love for sinners, unless you seek to understand it biblically. When the Bible speaks of God's highest love for man, it points to the savior. It points to the cross.

- John 3:16 - **16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...**
- Romans 5:8 - **8 ..God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**
- 1 John 4:9-10 - **9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through**

him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Man's fundamental problem is that sin separates us from God and makes us His enemies. God's love for mankind did not lead Him to excuse sin, to turn a blind eye, or to forget sin. Anyone who says that is how God loves, does not know God. It would be impossible for God to excuse sin, because it would be a violation of His nature. No, God's love for the world led Him to do something far beyond what any man could imagine.

To explain that, I'd like you to focus on the first part of verse 19 where it says, **"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell..."** and the last part of verse 20 where it says, **"making peace by the blood of his cross."**

I've got to be honest, preaching on this text makes me feel like Moses standing on holy ground. Part of me just wants to put my hand over my mouth and weep. The One in whom the fullness of God dwelled bled and died to make peace between us and God.

How cheap a thing - how shallow a thing the world makes God's love out to be. They either believe His love will cause Him to freely accept sinners, as if with a wink and a nod at sin God will swing wide the gates of Heaven, compelled by his limitless love. Or, even if they do in some way accept their need for a savior, their boastful pride exalts itself in the price God paid for them. I once saw a t-shirt that said on the front, "God thinks I am to die for."

No! God's love didn't compel Him to send His Son because of how highly He views you! God's love compelled Him to send His Son because He pitied you! Because you were helpless before Him. You were without strength - weak - and had nothing to offer Him. The high cost paid for you says nothing about you, it says everything about dire straits you were in before Him.

Do you see the depths of the war God has for sinners in these verses? Do you see how fierce and terrible His enmity against mankind must be? Listen, the war of God against humanity rages so hot, the fierceness of His anger is so great, their

case before Him so hopeless, that only the blood of His Son in whom **all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell** could extinguish His wrath for you.

You must see the deity of Christ in these verses. The deity of Christ is absolutely essential to the Gospel. Have you ever considered that? Many men have died on Roman crosses. Their deaths were what they deserved - the bible calls it wages - it's what they earned on account of their sin. There is no amount of human deaths that could ever pay for even one sin. Only Christ, as God in the flesh - an infinite being - could stand in the gap for you and absorb all the wrath God had for your sin.

When you see verses like John 3:16, or our text this morning in Colossians, in addition to reflecting on His great love you should also tremble and think to yourself, *Oh how great and dreadful God's war with sinners must be. How terrible their state before Him, and how desperately they need to be reconciled.* The cost is so high because the offense is so great!

I want to make sure I don't give you the wrong impression about God's nature or His attributes. God is not a warmonger. He was not the aggressor in this war, we were. In fact, our scripture this morning is all about the wonder and the glory of the love of God to end the hostility and establish peace with man once again.

Finish this sentence: Jesus is the Prince of...? Peace.

We get that title from a very familiar verse - Isaiah 9:6 - and it is a very popular verse around Christmas time because it speaks of the coming of the Messiah as a child.

Isaiah 9:6

**6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, PRINCE OF PEACE.**

That verse is very familiar to us, but listen to how Isaiah goes on in verse 7:

**7 Of the INCREASE of his government and of PEACE
THERE WILL BE NO END.**

That promise of ever-increasing peace in Isaiah 9:7, and the reconciliation of all things that we see in verse 20 are very closely related. I want to get into the specifics of what “all things” means. Where does it begin? How does it increase? Where is it going? Where do we find its ultimate fulfillment?

That leads me to the next lesson on your bulletins.

The reconciliation of all things...

(Lesson 2) begins with people.

Take another look at verse 20. We’ve discussed how the word “reconcile” deals with relationships. The way verse 20 is worded might seem odd at first. You might expect it to say *to reconcile to himself all [His elect]*, or *to reconcile to himself all [His people]*, but instead, it says, “**to reconcile to himself all things.**” This verse is not only about the relationship between God and man. It is incredibly far-reaching. It describes nothing less than how God is restoring the entire universe back into a loving relationship with Himself. We are going to see just how far reaching this is in the following lessons, but for now I want to focus on where reconciliation begins.

Think through this with me. God desires to reconcile “all things” to Himself, we’ve seen that. The reason things are unreconciled to Him now is because of man’s hostility with Him through sin. Sin is what caused everything to fall under the curse of God. So if God wants to restore the universe to Himself once again, He’s going to have to do what? He’s going to have to do something about sin.

Have you ever heard the phrase, “God loves the sinner, but hates the sin?” Man, that sounds nice, doesn’t it? Nobody gets offended when you say that. Why? Because it makes a separation between the sinner and their sin. It makes it sound as

if the sinner (the person) will receive God's love, and only their sin will receive His anger. But friends, that's not biblical. When God pours out His wrath, it doesn't somehow miss the sinner and only strike their sin.

Listen to Psalm 5:4-6

**4 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.**

**5 The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.**

**6 You destroy those who speak lies;
the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.**

God hates evildoers. Psalm 11:5 says, "**his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.**" But it's also true that He loves them. We've seen how God loves even His enemies. This is not a contradiction, God is able to do both, perfectly, because both responses reflect His nature.

I think it is greatly misleading to tell people that God loves the sinner, and hates the sin, because of what they hear when you say it. BUT, I also see a great deal of truth in it for those who have been reconciled to God.

In the previous lesson, we spoke about the high cost of reconciliation, but we didn't cover what Christ's death on the cross actually accomplished. It accomplished what the phrase, "God loves the sinner, but hates the sin" implies. It accomplished a separation between the sinner and their sins.

Up until now, I've tried to speak in very general terms about mankind. But now, much like Paul in verse 21, I'm going to get more specific. There is a clear difference between the love God has for mankind in general and the love God has for the reconciled. Look at verse 21 with me.

It begins with the words "**And you**". Paul is addressing the Colossian believers specifically. We know this because the letter, in verse 2, is addressed to "**the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae...**"

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

We've established that all men enter this world as the enemies of God, having inherited the sinful nature from Adam that can only produce sinners, and then they go on continuing their warfare with God through a sinful life. Here Paul makes it clear that the Colossians he is addressing have already been reconciled. They have passed from a state of alienation from God to reconciled with Him. Their warfare with God is over, and this reconciliation came by way of His, that is Christ's, death.

Here's how: By sending His Son to die on the cross, God struck at the very heart of that which separates us from Him - He struck at the very heart of that which makes us His enemies - He made a separation between the sinner and their sins. He took our sins away. That is why He is called, **"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29)

Now, He did not simply remove our sins. If He simply removed the sin from us, that would make Him an unjust judge. For these Colossian believers, and for you, if you are in Christ, God removed your sins and placed them on His Son who was willing to bear them for you.

Listen to Isaiah 53:4-6

4 Surely he has borne our griefs

and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken,

smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;

he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have turned—every one—to his own way;

and the Lord has laid on him

the iniquity of us all.

That is love. That is the ultimate love of God properly understood. His soul hated you and was at war with you, but He sent His son to bear your sins and suffer the wrath of God for you. That is the highest degree of love there is. In Jesus' own words, John 15:13 - **Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**

The world doesn't understand the love of God. They want a god that will love them in their sin, not a God that removes their sin from them. They are idolaters, worshipping and believing in a god that isn't real, one that has unconditional love and peace with mankind. That god doesn't exist.

The true God loves in a way that is more magnificent and glorious than any shallow invention of man. Jesus - the sinless one - became sin for us.

(2 Corinthians 5:21, NKJV) **...He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

Because He removed our sins from us, we are fully at peace with Him. Not merely at peace, but reconciled. Look at the end of verse 22, and see what His death accomplished for us.

Christ died **“in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”**

How thoroughly did Christ remove their sins? Perfectly. Completely. In the eyes of God everyone in Christ has no sin, and because of that, there is no more war, no more separation, only peace and reconciliation. That is what the blood of Christ accomplished. That is why Jesus said, **No one comes to the Father except through me.** (John 14:6b)

Now, I want you to notice the most important word in verse 23. Do you see it? It's the word "if."

23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

“If” is the most important word because it shows that the gift of reconciliation with God through Christ is conditional. It is for the world, but it must be received by an enduring faith. It’s available to you, but you must take hold of it. The word “if” makes it clear that we cannot proclaim to the world, “GOD LOVES YOU,” indiscriminately. No, as believers we have a very different message for the world.

Let me draw your attention to the words “heard” and “proclaimed.”

If you have repented and placed your faith in Christ and have received reconciliation with God, you did so because somebody, or maybe many people, were faithful to preach the gospel to you. This is where we are at in the timeline of events in God’s plan to reconcile the universe to Himself. God is reconciling a people to Himself and those who are reconciled become reconcilers.

At the end of verse 23, it says **“of which I, Paul, became a minister.”** If you are a Christian, you can replace Paul’s name in that verse with your own.

That brings me to the next lesson in your bulletins.

The reconciliation of all things...

(Lesson 3) calls us to ministry.

So far, this message has been heavy on teaching and light on application. If you have been waiting for the application, this is it. Keep your spot in Colossians, we will be coming back to it, but please turn in your bibles to 2 Corinthians 5. 2 Corinthians is four books to the left from Colossians.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 is closely related to this text and it deals with the believer’s role in God’s plan of reconciliation.

Read with me, starting at 2 Cor 5:17.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

I want to be very disciplined and only focus on three aspects of these verses -

First, those who have been reconciled have been given a ministry. You've been called to service by God. Do you see that in verse 18? This is the reason that God doesn't take Christians to Heaven immediately when they are saved. There is a world of lost people out there that don't know the first thing about their Maker. They are unaware of the severe wrath they are living under, and they are unaware of the overwhelming love of God that is displayed in the giving of a Savior. God has called us to serve these people.

- What are your relationships with the lost like?
- Do you behave toward them like someone sent by God to serve them?
- What do your social media interactions with the lost look like? Would they say you are more concerned about the latest political news or the good news?
- Parents, are you fulfilling this role with your children? When they sin, are you acting as a minister of reconciliation between them and God, or are you only concerned about how they can reconcile with you?

Second, God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation - the gospel. This is not a message only given to pastors and evangelists, it's been given to you, Christian.

- Do you know it well enough to communicate it effectively to the people around you?
- Do you know the common ways people get the gospel wrong, so that you can correct them and point them to scripture?

- If you do know these things, are you living up to the trust God has placed in you to proclaim it?

Third, Christians are ambassadors for Christ. Why are we called ambassadors? Go ahead and turn back in your bibles to Colossians 1.

Look with me at Colossians 1:13 **13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son**

We have been transferred to a new kingdom, friends. **Our citizenship is in heaven** (Phil 3:20). Our role on this earth is no longer to be a willing participant in Satan's kingdom, but to act as ambassadors from Christ's kingdom. Think of it like this, God has appointed us to represent His interests in a foreign land, as it were.

We must speak His message, not our own. This can be difficult because it will sound like you are judging people. Remember, you aren't judging them by communicating the King's message. You are acting as an ambassador to Christ. Speak His words. Be very clear. This can be incredibly uncomfortable, but we must be faithful.

Let me tell you about a discussion I had with a non-christian that I nearly blundered completely.

In the work I do, we rely heavily on contracts from other companies. I manage a group of people where the majority of their work comes from one contract. So you can be sure, the customer behind this contract is extremely important to our business.

This person knows I'm a Christian and loves to call me and ask what I think about extremely divisive topics like abortion, immigration, etc. This has given me an open door to speak about the spiritual side of these topics, and I've been able to preach the gospel to this person on multiple occasions.

So, all that to say this: I don't know why she did this, and I don't know what might have happened to this person to prompt this call, but one day, she calls me and very seriously asks, "So, do you think I'm going to hell?"

I'm not kidding, I think my stomach hit the floor. Instantly I was in a panic. I think I stammered something like, "Uh.... Well.... All people that reject Christ will find themselves in hell..."

She said, "No that's not what I mean, do you think I will go to hell?"

And again, I said, "Well, everyone is a sinner and we're all in the same boat... Everyone needs Christ or they will experience God's wrath against sin..."

Thankfully, and I mean that truthfully, thankfully she interrupted me again and said, "No, I'm asking you do you think **I** am going to hell?"

She knew what I believed, but she wanted to see if I would say it. To say it in no uncertain terms. She could sense the evasion. She could sense I was softening the message.

I had to decide whether to be true to the message or be safe. This is the work of a minister of reconciliation. This is what it means to be an ambassador of Christ.

I very carefully said, "You will go to hell," and I made myself stop speaking.

I'll never forget. There was silence, then her response was simply, "OK". Like *I can't believe he said it*.

It was the only answer, I think, that she would accept, but leaving it there would have been another failure on my part. I rushed back in and said, "But it doesn't have to be that way! God has provided a Savior. Whosoever repents and calls on Him for salvation will be saved from that terrible fate."

We must do better than holding up signs that simply say, "GOD LOVES YOU!" We must do better than simple and easily confused statements like, "God loves the

sinner, but hates the sin.” We must do better, because as ambassadors, we don’t have permission from our King to confuse the message.

I’ve mostly focused on the tendency to elevate God’s love to the exclusion of His wrath for sinners, but there are many that err in the other direction.

Some go to the other extreme and preach only God’s hatred for sinners. Think of Westboro Baptist Church with their protests at funerals and other events where they hold up signs declaring God’s hatred for everything.

Neither extreme is serving as a minister of reconciliation. Neither is preaching the message of reconciliation, and neither is acting as an ambassador on behalf of Christ. We are called to be honest about the sinner’s condition before God, and we are called to implore sinners to be reconciled to God through the Savior.

We must be about the Master’s work, because the window of opportunity for reconciliation with God is not open indefinitely. We know that this Satan-ruled world system is going to come to an end. When Christ returns in glory He will conquer and reign visibly for a thousand years in what is referred to as the Millennial Kingdom.

We are citizens of that kingdom now, in fact we are sent as ambassadors from God to serve while there is still time to work reconciliation. The time is coming for every person when reconciliation is no longer available. Either because a person dies without Christ, or because of the return of Christ to judge the earth.

This brings me to the next lesson your bulletins:

The reconciliation of all things...

(Lesson 4) increases during the Millennial Kingdom and culminates in re-creation.

Between Colossians 1:15-20 the words “all things” occur 5 times.

In these verses, Christ is described as the one who created “all things.” “All things were created through Him and “all things” were created for Him. He is preeminent over “all things” and He holds “all things” together.

When Christ returns at the Second Coming, it will no longer be fitting for “all things” to remain unreconciled to Him. He has earned peace between God and man by the blood of His cross, and that peace will have a dramatic effect on the curse. We saw that the reconciliation of “all things” started with people, but that was just the beginning. Many aspects of the curse will either be eliminated or greatly reduced during the Millennial Kingdom.

When He returns He will judge the earth, separating unbelievers from believers. Initially, only believers will be allowed to live on in the Millennial Kingdom. Not only is it unfitting for “all things” to remain unreconciled to Christ, but it is also unfitting for “all things” to remain unreconciled with those who have peace with God.

What are these “all things?” Everything that was a part of the curse. Everything that is a consequence of mankind’s rebellion. These things begin to change dramatically when Christ establishes His rule on the earth.

Let’s look at a few of the ways peace will increase during the Millennial Kingdom.

- First, Satan’s influence over the world will be ended:
 - Revelation 20:1-3 **1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended.**

- Christ will establish peace among the nations:
 - Isaiah 2:4 **He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people;**

**They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.**

- Christ will establish peace in nature:
 - Isaiah 11:6-9 **The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.**
 - 7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.**
 - 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.**
 - 9 They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain**

- Lifespans will increase significantly:
 - Isaiah 65:20 **No more shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not fill out his days,
for the young man shall die a hundred years old,
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.**

It would be a wonderful study to explore all the ways in which Christ will reconcile things to Himself during His Millennial reign, but you get the idea. He will put an end to man's lack of peace with the demonic realm, earthly governments, and even nature itself.

As praiseworthy as all of this is, this is not the end of God's work to reconcile all things. 2 Pet 3:13 tells us that, **according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**

John describes his vision of the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 21:1

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

What happens next is the final and greatest event in the reconciliation of all things. This is when God finishes His work in reconciling all things to Himself.

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

Heaven meets earth. God dwells with man. No more separation. No more curse. That is the love of God in Christ. That is what He accomplished for us on the cross by giving His life in our place.

That brings me to the last lesson.

The reconciliation of all things...

(Lesson 5) does not include unbelievers.

There is one last thing I want to clarify about these verses. Some people read verse 20 and see the ultimate salvation of all people - or Universalism. For anyone that believes the Bible to be God’s word, this is an absurd interpretation. If you believe the Bible, no verse properly interpreted can contradict another correctly interpreted verse. There are a large number of verses that make it clear many people will not be reconciled to a loving relationship with God.

Here is how I believe we must harmonize this verse with the rest of scripture. Look at verse 20 again. How are the words “all things” immediately qualified?

20 ...through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

All things on earth or in heaven. Think of it like this, what will be allowed to remain on earth or in heaven? All things that have been reconciled by Christ's death on the cross, right? But what about those who were not reconciled by Christ's death on the cross? Where will they be?

Listen to what Christ will say to every unbeliever in the judgement...He will say, **“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** (Matt 25:41)

This is certainly not a location in heaven or on earth. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus refers to this place of torment as “outer darkness”. In the Parable of the Wedding Feast, the man without a wedding garment (the man who was unsaved) was discovered at the feast where he didn't belong, and this is what the king commanded concerning him: **‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’** (Matthew 22:13)

Contrast “outer darkness” with what is said about life in the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 22:5 **5 ...night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.**

The place of torment is described as “outer darkness” because it will be far, far away from the source of light, which is God. It is said to be a place of weeping because of the intense sorrow of heart that will be experienced there. There will be gnashing of teeth because of the incredible suffering in the fires.

Many unbelievers have a false sense of hope that they will escape this place of torment because they are counting on God's love to overcome His wrath against their sin. Brothers and sisters in Christ, at least some of the blame for that confusion lands at our feet because of our lack of faithfulness to the message.

If you are an unbeliever here this morning, let me be as truthful and up front with you as possible. If you are without Christ...

- You are without hope.

- You are cut off from God on account of your sin.
- You may believe that you have many years to enjoy your life on this earth, but the truth is, you do not know what tomorrow will bring.
- You may be tempted to believe God will overlook your sin, but God will not and never has, ever, overlooked sin.
- The goodness you see in yourself will not change God's mind.
- You will not be forgiven by God.
- You will not experience God's love.
- You will not be given eternal life.

God has put His love on display by sending His Son to die for you. If you will not acknowledge Him as Lord, repent from your sin, and place your faith in Him to save you, do not presume on His love to excuse your sin. You cannot reject God's greatest act of love and expect to still receive love from Him when you stand before Him in judgement.

Friends, won't you be reconciled to God? Won't you receive by faith Christ's work on the cross for you? Won't you come to faith in Christ now, before it's too late?

Even if you refuse there is a sense in which you will still be reconciled to God, but it will not be a reconciliation to a restored relationship. The word *reconcile* can also mean a *settling of accounts*. It is an accounting term.

There is a sense in which God is going to settle the account of every person ever born. You can come to Christ by faith and have your account settled by Him so that God sees you as **holy and blameless and above reproach**, or you can forever be settling your own account in the torment of hell.

I implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20b)

Let's pray.