

Outside In

Colossians 1:20-22

Pierre Cannings, D.Phil

I. In v. 20

a. Reconciled

i. Reconciled –

1. Reconcile - 2 Cor 5:18; Eph 2:16 the universe is to form a unity, which has its goal in Christ
2. Restoration of friendly relationships and of peace where before there had been hostility and alienation. Ordinarily it also includes the removal of the offense which caused the disruption of peace and harmony. This was especially so in the relation of God with humanity, when Christ removed the enmity existing between God and mankind by his vicarious sacrifice. The Scripture speaks first of Christ's meritorious, substitutionary death in effecting reconciliation of God with sinners;
3. of reconciliation "to him" the language here, freed from the poetic constraints of the hymn, reverts to the more typical Pauline thought of reconciliation through Christ to God (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18–20;
4. *God is never the acc. Obj., but only men, or they and spirits. In Col. 1:22 also reconciliation is unmistakably of God, since He is the Subject of ἀποκαταλλάσσειν in v. 20. In men ἀποκαταλλάσσειν is preceded by alienation and enmity (Col. 1:22).*
5. In Col 1:20 the common understanding of reconciliation must be broadened. At the most basic level, reconciliation means the restoring of a broken relationship
6. Reconciliation usually involves two prerequisites: Both parties must have a willingness to be reconciled, and there must be an occasion that brings them together. God has demonstrated his willingness and provided the occasion by taking the initiative to send Jesus as reconciler

ii. All Things

1. To Himself

- a. What is being claimed is quite simply and profoundly that the divine purpose in the act of reconciliation and peacemaking was to restore the harmony of the original creation, to bring into renewed oneness and wholeness

“all things,” “whether things on the earth or things in the heavens” (see on 1:16).

b. Made Peace

i. Peace –

1. to cause a right or harmonious relationship, make peace cause a state of peace or reconciliation between persons—‘to make peace, to make things right.’ God) made things right between himself and people through (his Son’s) death on the cross’ Col 1:20. εἰρηνοποιέω is closely related in meaning to the series in 40.1 in that the making of peace or reestablishing peace between persons is a distinctive feature of reconciliation
2. It is the peace of relationships, not feelings. Although the human heart cries for feelings of peace, the deep need is for a relationship of peace. When relationships are correct, feelings follow
3. Paul identified restored order often as a result of the work of Christ. It applied to individuals in Rom 5:1, where the peace with God is the immediate result of justification. It applied corporately in relationships in Eph 2:11
4. Here, as generally for Paul, the peace brings order and harmony into what is otherwise chaotic and distorted. The reconciliation of all things, as interpreted here, suggests that the peace is the restoring of harmony to all things, the many dimensions of existence

ii. Blood of His Cross

1. “through the blood of his cross” does make explicit what was implicit, that the act of peacemaking was accomplished by Christ’s death
2. The Greek text has a more direct statement, “through the blood of his cross.” Several aspects of this statement demand attention. First, the blood of the cross points to the theology of the blood atonement which runs throughout Scripture and speaks of the radical death of Jesus (blood actually flowed from the body). Second, it identifies the substitutionary aspects of the death of Christ by recalling the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament, which were substitutionary in nature. Third, the expression identifies blood with the cross.

c. Whether

i. Earth

ii. Heaven

1. it presumes a state of estrangement or hostility. In other words, between the two strophes, and the two phases of divine activity in Christ, there is presupposed an unmentioned event or state, that is, presumably the falling of the cosmos under the

domination of the heavenly powers created as part of τὰ πάντα (1:16), the state already spoken of in 1:13 (“the power of darkness”), an ongoing crisis now resolved in the cross (see on 2:15). The defeat of these powers is also the means of reconciling heaven and earth

2. “How far this restoration of universal nature may be subjective, as involved in the changed perceptions of man thus brought into harmony with God, and how far it may have an objective and independent existence
3. Creation is the handiwork of God, and the Christian should understand the unity of all things in Christ. Elsewhere Paul reflected on this theme in 1 Cor 15:25–28 and Phil 2:9–11. These cosmic dimensions are as much a part of the gospel as are the personal.
4. Significantly, an act in time and space had repercussions beyond both time and space. Jesus’ death at a specific point in time and in the physical dimension of life affected beings outside of time who live in the spiritual dimensions of existence. Thus there is a unity of the two worlds, physical and spiritual. They are reconciled in an act of time, and peace is forever established

II. Out v. 21

- a. Formerly Alienated - excluded from the corporate life of Israel
 - i. At all events, it is not surprising that Gentile converts looking back to their old way of life should characterize it in strongly negative terms. Such an evaluation need not be self-justification by means of biographical reconstruction, but here presumably reflects the sense of having shifted from one realm (where the dominant force was evil and dark) to another (1:13; cf. Gal. 1:4).
 - ii. At the same time we should recall that it is a cosmic alienation which is implied in 1:20 and that Paul elsewhere labored to persuade his fellow Jews that they, too, were guilty of defection from God’s way of making righteous (Rom. 2; 11:28). Nevertheless, here the thought is directed specifically at “you (Gentiles),” with the implication that Israel’s relation with God models the relation to which all creation should aspire, as now the church (as the body of Christ) provides that model (1:18a, 24).
 - iii. It is now made clear that the state of alienation and hostility implied in 1:20 had been a fact in the readers’ own past, the verb “to be” with the perfect participle expressing a persisting state of affairs. The verb which the participle is from, ἀπαλλοτριόω (“estrangle, alienate”), appears only here and in Eph. 2:12 and 4:18, but the passive (used in all three cases)

would be familiar in reference to human estrangement Ps. 69 and to alienation from God by sin and idolatry (Ps. 58[LXX 57]:3; Ezek. 14:5, 7; Hos. 9:10).

- iv. This context deals with reconciliation. When Paul used the term “alienation,” it obviously meant that at one time the Colossians had been outside the sphere of God’s blessing. In Eph 2:12 Paul used the same term and form (perfect passive participle) to express the relationship to the “commonwealth of Israel” (NASB). No doubt the same meaning applies here. The Colossian Christians were alienated from the hope of Israel. Israel looked for the hope of salvation through a Messiah. The Gentiles had no such expectation
- b. Hostile in Mind - enemies of God
 - i. That human guilt and hostility are in view, and not nameless fate or inscrutable destiny, is clear from the supplementary description: “enemies in mind” and “in works that are wicked.” Paul previously had not hesitated to speak in such terms (“enemies [of God],” Rom. 5:10; 11:28),
 - ii. In this case δῖάνοια has the force of “mind (as a kind of thinking), disposition, thought,” hence “hostile in attitude” “in heart and mind” It reflects the determined and self-sustained attitude illuminated in Rom. 1:21, where human creation, having disowned its creatureliness, finds a self-satisfying mode of existence in ignorance
 - iii. The second significant term is “mind.” In the LXX the term is usually translated “heart,” and the terms in the New Testament speak of a person’s disposition. Actions naturally arise from the disposition, which is a matter of the mind/heart. Paul explicitly stated as much in Rom 1:18–32,
 - iv. “Enemies,” while a strong term, occurs in Scripture to describe the contrast between God and those who do not do his will (Rom 5:10; Jas 4:4). The word has an active connotation. They made themselves enemies
- c. Engaged in Evil Deeds
 - i. Consequently the “deeds” (see on 1:10) which such an attitude produces are “wicked” of God
 - ii. For in Ephesians the alienation is “from the body politic of Israel” and “the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12) as well as “from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). Consequently the “evil deeds” in mind can be characterized in terms of the indictment of Rom. 1:18–32

III. Outside In v. 22

- a. Yet
 - i. “But now” (νυνὶ δέ) is a genuine Paulinism to express this moment of divine reversal (Rom. 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; 11:30; 1 Cor. 15:20)

b. Reconciled

i. In Fleshly Body

1. Reconciliation happened “in the body of his flesh through (his) death.” This is the second occurrence of σῶμα (“body”) in the letter (after 1:18a)
2. Paul used sacrificial terminology to describe the way reconciliation occurred. First, reconciliation involved a physical sacrifice: “by Christ’s physical body.” Resuming and applying the language of 1:20

ii. Through Death

c. In Order

i. Present You - to make you

1. The repetition of “you” underscores how personalized was the divine condescension; of course, it does not mean “you alone” but “you” among all the other “you”s, all of whom could count themselves the beneficiaries of personally characterized and directed grace.
2. Παρίστημι (“present”) here signifies a formal bringing before and presentation in the implied hope of acceptance and acknowledgment (as in 2 Cor. 4:14; 11:2; Eph. 5:27; 2 Tim. 2:15; see also 1:28). Thus it could be used both of offering a sacrifice (hence Rom. 12:1) and of bringing someone before a judge (hence Rom. 14:10;

ii. Holy - Ephesians 1:4 of human beings consecrated to God, holy, pure, reverent

1. also derives from the cult, denoting that which has been set apart, consecrated to God. ἄμωμος (“without blemish or blame”) is used most commonly in the LXX of the physical perfection required of the sacrificial animal (e.g., Exod. 29:1; Lev. 1:3, 10, etc.; Num. 6:14, etc.; Ezek. 43:22–25; 45:18, 23; 46:4–6, 13),

iii. Blameless - to being without fault and therefore morally blameless

1. Scholars have taken Paul’s language in three ways: sacrificially, judicially, or generally. The first two statements of the verse recall the language of animal sacrifice. Every animal offered to God had to be holy and without flaw

iv. Beyond Reproach - blameless, irreproachable of Christians

1. Free from accusation” is a judicial term. It pictures a judge declaring a person innocent. This is a better understanding because Paul clearly taught that each believer would stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give account.

Word Studies

Reconcile - 2 Cor 5:18; Eph 2:16 the universe is to form a unity, which has its goal in Christ **Col 1:20**¹

Reconciliation. Restoration of friendly relationships and of peace where before there had been hostility and alienation. Ordinarily it also includes the removal of the offense which caused the disruption of peace and harmony. This was especially so in the relation of God with humanity, when Christ removed the enmity existing between God and mankind by his vicarious sacrifice. The Scripture speaks first of Christ's meritorious, substitutionary death in effecting reconciliation of God with sinners; of sinners appropriating this free gift by faith; the promised forgiveness and salvation that become the sinners' possession by grace; and, finally, reconciliation to God (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:19; Eph 2:16).

The term *katalassein* (Rom 5:10; and 2 Cor 5:19) signifies first of all the reconciliation of God with the world, expressing God's initial change of heart toward sinners. The problem is not rightly addressed by questioning whether the unchanging God ever changes his mind; the situation rather is one where an altered relationship now exists between God and sinners by Christ's interposing sacrifice on behalf of fallen mankind. The point of the reconciliation is that God for Christ's sake now feels toward sinners as though they had never offended him. The reconciliation is complete and perfect, covering mankind both extensively and intensively, that is, all sinners and all sin. The cause of rupture between God and sinners has now been healed, a truth wholly independent of humanity's mood or attitude. While sinners were still the objects of God's just wrath, Christ, in full harmony with the gracious will of his heavenly Father, interposed himself for their sakes, for the restoration of harmony. So basic is this truth that without objective reconciliation there is no thought of salvation, of regeneration, of faith, of Christian life. The initiative in reconciliation, moreover, is all on God's side; through his Word, the gospel, God reveals to sinners that he is fully reconciled with them because of Christ²

ἀποκαταλλάσσω is found in the N³T only in Col. and Eph., where → καταλλάσσω does not occur. Since it is never found prior to Paul, it is perhaps coined by him. Its meaning and use are essentially the same as those of καταλλάσσω. A difference is that in addition to God or the πλήρωμα (Col. 1:20) Christ is also the Subject of ἀποκαταλλάσσω (Col. 1:22; Eph. 2:16), whereas God alone is the Subject of καταλλάσσω. Yet in the case of ἀποκαταλλάσσω as well

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 112.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Reconciliation," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1823–1824.

³NT New Testament.

as καταλ λάσσω God is never the acc⁴. obj⁵., but only men, or they and spirits. In Col. 1:22 also reconciliation is unmistakably of God, since He is the Subject of ἀποκαταλλάσσειν in v⁶. 20. In men ἀποκαταλλάσσειν is preceded by alienation and enmity (Col. 1:22). This enmity does not consist in discord or mistrust. It is “in the mind by wicked works.” If ἀποκαταλλάσσειν applies to the one addressed, it is a completed fact.⁷¹ Its purpose is that he might stand in the last judgment (Col. 1:22). Col. 1:20 speaks of the gracious purpose which God had demonstrated (εὐδόκησεν, v⁸. 19) to reconcile the whole world to Himself; it does not speak of a reconciliation of the world already concluded. ἀποκαταλλάξαι cannot refer merely to the removal of a relationship of guilt by God, since it is plainly expounded as a conclusion of peace in Col. 1:20 and Eph. 2:15, and as a new creation in Eph. 2:15. Hence it is not something one-sided. It embraces the total life situation of man. It does not refer merely to his guilt before God. In Eph. 2:16 reconciliation to God also brings reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, and in Col. 1:20 the reconciliation of men to God also carries with it that of supraterritorial beings.

In Col. 1:20 ἀποκαταλλάξαι has often been given a wider significance. Ewald takes it to imply a restoration of orderly, right and original relationships; the object is creaturely being rather than conscious creatures. Dibelius finds in it the subjection of all things to Christ. All such attempts are shattered by the elucidation of ἀποκαταλλάξαι by εἰρηνοποιήσας. In 1:20 ἀποκαταλλάξαι means exactly the same as in 1:22 and Eph. 2:16. The εἰς αὐτόν is most simply related to God, as in 2 C. 5:19: κόσμον καταλλάσσω ἑαυτῷ. If this means that in the same sentence αὐτός is referred in one case to God and the other to Christ, this is in exact correspondence with v⁹. 22, where the first αὐτοῦ can refer only to Christ and the second only to God. If we refer the εἰς αὐτόν in 1:20 to Christ, this yields the thought that the beings created in Christ (1:16) have found in Him their Head (2:10), so that the reconciliation of all things leads to their subjection to Christ, even though it does not consist in it.¹⁰

⁴acc. accusative.

⁵obj. object.

⁶v. verse.

⁷¹ Cf. the aor. in Col. 1:22; Eph. 2:16.

⁸v. verse.

⁹v. verse.

¹⁰ Friedrich Büchsel, “[Ἀλλάσσω, Ἀντάλλαγμα, Ἀπ-, Δι-, Καταλλάσσω, Καταλλαγή, Ἀποκατ-, Μεταλλάσσω.](#)” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 258–259.

Peace - **to cause a right or harmonious relationship, make peace**¹¹ the reference is to making peace or concord¹² **40.4 εἰρηνοποιέω**: to cause a state of peace or reconciliation between persons—‘to make peace, to make things right.’ εἰρηνοποίησας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ ‘(God) made things right between himself and people through (his Son’s) death on the cross’ Col 1:20. εἰρηνοποιέω is closely related in meaning to the series in 40.1 in that the making of peace or reestablishing peace between persons is a distinctive feature of reconciliation, but the focus in εἰρηνοποιέω seems to be upon the resulting state rather than upon the process.¹³

Alienated - *excluded from the corporate life of Israel* **2:12**.¹⁴ In the N¹⁵T we find only the part¹⁶. perf¹⁷. pass¹⁸. and the word occurs only in the Prison Epistles at Col. 1:21 and Eph. 2:12; 4:18. It denotes the state prior to reconciliation. The parallel expressions make it plain that in all three passages it applies only to this state. Col. 1:21: ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθρούς τῆ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς; Eph. 2:12: ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας κτλ.; Eph. 4:18: ἐσκοτωμένοι τῆ διανοίᾳ ὄντες ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ θεοῦ.¹⁹² There is reference to a process or act which has brought about this state, whether we think of the judgment of God or the guilt of man, only to the extent that this state is culpable and worthy of condemnation; the presuppositions of the state are no longer expressly in view. As the parallels ἐχθρός and ξένος show, ἀπηλλοτριωμένος means almost the same as ἀλλότριος. Aristot²⁰. Pol²¹., II, 8, p. 1268a, 40:

¹¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 288.

¹² Werner Foerster, “Εἰρήνη, Εἰρηνεύω, Εἰρηνικός, Εἰρηνοποιός, Εἰρηνοποιέω,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 420.

¹³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 501–502.

¹⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 96.

¹⁵NT New Testament.

¹⁶part. participle.

¹⁷perf. perfect.

¹⁸pass. passive.

¹⁹² Cf. ψ 68:9: ἀπηλλοτριωμένος ἐγενήθη τῶν ἀδελφοῖς μου καὶ ξένος τῶν υἱοῖς τῆς μητρός μου; Ez. 14:5: κατὰ τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν τὰς ἀπηλλοτριωμένας ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασιν αὐτῶν; Ps. Sol. 17:15: ἐν ἀλλοτριότητι ὁ ἐχθρὸς ἐποίησεν, ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ· καὶ ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ ἀλλοτρία ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν. The meaning “excluded” or “expelled” is possible (Jos. Ant., 11, 148: ὡς τῶν ... οὐκ ἀπαντησάντων ἀπαλλοτριωθησομένων τοῦ πλήθους), but seems less likely in view of the parallels.

²⁰Aristot. Aristotle, of Stageiros (c. 384–322 B.C.), with his teacher Plato the greatest of the Greek philosophers and the founder of the peripatetic school, quoted in each case from the comprehensive edition of the Academia Regia Borussica, 1831 ff.

²¹Pol. *Politica*.

ἀλλότριον τῆς πολιτείας is a striking parallel to Eph. 2:12. Light is also shed on Eph. 4:18 by Pol²², II, 8, since οὐδενὸς μετέχων in the latter is parallel to ἀλλότριον, and ἀπηλλοτριωμένος in the former means “without a share in (the life of God).”²³

Hostile – enemies of God

Present - *to make you*

Holy – *Ephesians 1:4 of human beings consecrated to God, holy, pure, reverent*²⁴

Blameless- to being without fault and therefore morally blameless, *blameless*²⁵

Beyond Reproach blameless, irreproachable of Christians gener²⁶. ὃς βεβαιώσει ὑμᾶς ἅ. ἐν τ. ἡμέρᾳ τ. κυρίου *who will establish you as blameless in the day of the Lord*²⁷ -

Commentary Studies

²²Pol. *Politica*.

²³ Friedrich Büchsel, “[Ἄλλος, Ἀλλότριος, Ἀπαλλοτριόω, Ἀλλογενής, Ἀλλόφυλος.](#)” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 265–266.

²⁴ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10.

²⁵ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 56.

²⁶gener. gener. = generally

²⁷ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 76.

1:20 καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, [δι’ αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. That the thrust of this second strophe or supplementary expansion is directed to this as the climactic point (Findeis 392–95), to the work of redemption accomplished in Christ (1:14), is made clear beyond dispute by the two verbs used here (“reconcile,” “make peace”). The clause is still governed by the ὅτι at the beginning of 1:19; that is, 1:20 continues the explanation of why the risen Christ is preeminent in all things (1:18). And the subject therefore is still πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα, further emphasizing the personal character of “the fullness” as the completeness of God’s presence throughout creation (see on 1:19); in contrast, the repetition of the controlling subject and verb in some translations (“and through him God was pleased to ...,” NRS²⁸V, similarly NE²⁹B) both modifies the subject (not “the fullness of God”) and unwisely implies a second act of divine choice.

The act of reconciliation is described in the uniquely compounded verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω, which is used in literary Greek only here, in 1:22, and in Eph. 2:16 and was therefore quite possibly coined by Paul (F. Büchsel, *TDN*³⁰T 1.258). Like the simpler form, καταλλάσσω (Rom. 5:10; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18–20), it presumes a state of estrangement or hostility. In other words, between the two strophes, and the two phases of divine activity in Christ, there is presupposed an unmentioned event or state, that is, presumably the falling of the cosmos under the domination of the heavenly powers created as part of τὰ πάντα (1:16), the state already spoken of in 1:13 (“the power of darkness”),⁴³¹⁴ an ongoing crisis now resolved in the cross (see on 2:15). The defeat of these powers is also the means of reconciling heaven and earth,⁴³²⁵ unusually “to him” (see n. ³³³), in some contrast to Eph. 2:16, which has in view specifically the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile to God, more typical of Paul (cf. Rom. 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18–20). The thought is coherently Jewish (cf. Isa. 11:6–9; 65:17, 25; *Jubilees* 1:29; 23:26–29; 1 *Enoch* 91:16–17; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 2.192: God as “peace-maker” among

²⁸NRSV New Revised Standard Version

²⁹NEB New English Bible

³⁰*TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

³¹⁴⁴ Schweizer thinks that the background lies in the idea of cosmic strife current in Greco-Roman thought of the period (“Versöhnung”; also “Slaves,” followed particularly by Wolter 86–87). Findeis 348–49, 443–45, indicates how readily this can be reexpressed in more contemporary existential terms of the experience of disorientation.

³²⁴⁵ That cosmic reconciliation is in view (and not just human creation) is implied by the thematic τὰ πάντα. Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* 62, regards this as the most difficult to accommodate to the rest of Paul’s thought (similarly Marshall 126); but cf. Rom. 8:19–23; Phil. 2:10–11. See further particularly Gnllka, *Kolosserbrieff* 74–76; for the older debate (only animate or also inanimate creation, angels as well as humans) see Abbott 221–24 and Michl; and for more recently posed alternatives see O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* 53–56.

³³³ It would be possible to read the original ΕΙΣΑΥΤΟΝ (written without accents or breathings) as εἰς αὐτόν = εἰς ἑαυτόν (“to himself”), that is, to God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19), rather than as εἰς αὐτόν (see, e.g., Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* 169–70); but that would break the triple parallel of “in him,” “through him,” “to him” (1:16/1:19–20).

the various parts of the universe; a similar role is attributed to the Logos in *De plantatione* 10 and *Quis rerum divinarum heres* 206; see further Hartman, “Reconciliation”) and in sharp contrast to later Gnosticism, for which such a reconciliation would be unthinkable. The implication is that the purpose, means, and manner of (final) reconciliation have already been expressed by God, not that the reconciliation is already complete.⁴³⁴⁶

Almost as infrequent is the word εἰρηνοποιέω (“make peace”; only here in the New Testament; in LXX only in Prov. 10:10; the adjective only in Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 2.192; Matt. 5:9), though, of course, the idea of peace as the cessation of war would be more familiar. The phrase is almost unnecessary, particularly if the following six words were lacking in the original, leaving simply “making peace through him,” since it simply repeats the thought of the preceding verb, though it adds the richness of the Jewish concept of “peace” (see on 1:2). But the appended phrase “through the blood of his cross” does make explicit what was implicit, that the act of peacemaking was accomplished by Christ’s death. In its elements it is strongly Pauline, but the phrase itself is unique in Paul. Moreover, the combination of the elements (“blood” and “cross”) and the present context put them at some remove from the more characteristic Pauline usage: the “blood” of Christ in Paul more naturally evokes the thought of his death as a bloody sacrifice (Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 11:25; and cf. Eph. 2:13–18 with Heb. 10:19), whereas here the imagery of warfare and triumph (2:15) suggests rather the blood of battle. And in Paul the “cross” usually evokes thought of shame and embarrassment because of the shameful death on a cross (1 Cor. 1:17–18; Gal. 5:11; 6:12; Phil. 2:8; cf. Heb. 12:2), whereas here it is itself an instrument of warfare by which peace is achieved (see on 2:14–15). Here again, then, we either have to hypothesize a Paul who has modified his own characteristic motifs, and so speak of the early and late Paul, or we can speak of a close disciple who has modulated his master’s voice to express his own adaptations and emphases. Either way we can hardly avoid the adjective “Pauline” in describing the theology expressed.

It is obviously no accident that the verse echoes the “all things through him and to him” of 1:16–

1:16: τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισαι
1:20: δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκατάλλαξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν—

nor that the last line echoes the earlier phrase of 1:16–

1:16: τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
1:20: εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

What is being claimed is quite simply and profoundly that the divine purpose in the act of reconciliation and peacemaking was to restore the harmony of the original creation, to bring into renewed oneness and wholeness “all things,” “whether things on the earth or things in the heavens” (see on 1:16). That the church has a role in this is implied in the correlation of 1:18a with 1:20. And when we include the earlier talk of the gospel “in all the world (κόσμος) bearing fruit and growing” (1:6), and the subsequent talk of the ages-old mystery being made known

³⁴⁴⁶ Lohmeyer 43–47, 67–68 makes “reconciliation” the key to the whole hymn and attempts to interpret it against the background of the Day of Atonement; but see Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* 45–46 (cf. Schweizer, *Colossians* 74–75).

among all the nations (1:27), the implication becomes clear: it is by its gospel living (1:10) and by its gospel preaching (1:27) that the cosmic goal of reconciled perfection will be achieved (1:28; cf. Findeis 405–15, 422–26).

The vision is vast. The claim is mind-blowing. It says much for the faith of these first Christians that they should see in Christ’s death and resurrection quite literally the key to resolving the disharmonies of nature and the inhumanities of humankind, that the character of God’s creation and God’s concern for the universe in its fullest expression could be so caught and encapsulated for them in the cross of Christ (cf. already 1 Cor. 1:22–25, 30). In some ways still more striking is the implied vision of the church as the focus and means toward this cosmic reconciliation—the community in which that reconciliation has already taken place (or begun to take place) and whose responsibility it is to live out (cf. particularly 3:8–15) as well as to proclaim its secret (cf. 4:2–6).

Reconciliation and Response (1:21–23)

21 And you, once alienated and enemies in mind in works that are evil, 22 he has now reconciled³⁵¹ in the body of his flesh through his death, to present you holy and unblemished and blameless before him, 23 provided that you remain in the faith established and steadfast and not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, proclaimed in all creation under heaven, of which I Paul became servant.³⁶²

The impression that 1:15–20 was in large measure a preformed unit that Paul and Timothy took over for their own purposes is strengthened by the way in which 1:21–23 seem deliberately to pick up the final theme of the hymn and to repeat and elaborate it, bringing the cosmic vision of the hymn (in third person) down to earth by relating it immediately to the readers. Hence the emphatic opening “and you....” Moreover, Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 119–22, shows how pivotal 1:21–23 are in that they gather up earlier emphases (vv. 22a/20, 22b/12b, 21–22/13, 23/4–6) and in effect indicate the themes to be subsequently developed:

21–22	23a	23b
1:24–2:5	2:6–23	3:1–4:1

1:21 καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς. It is now made clear that the state of alienation and hostility implied in 1:20 had been a fact in the readers’ own past, the verb “to be” with the perfect participle expressing a persisting state of affairs. The verb which the participle is from, ἀπαλλοτριῶ (“estrangle,

³⁵¹ The passive form ἀποκατηλλάγητε meets all the criteria to be counted as original: it is well supported (Ɱ⁴⁶ B), it explains the other readings, and it is the most difficult (following ὑμᾶς; Metzger 621–22). But since the second person passive fits so badly we may be justified in concluding that the early correction/improvement was wholly justified (cf. Lightfoot 249–50; Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* 72).

³⁶² Ɱ* reads κῆρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος (“herald and apostle”) instead of διάκονος (“servant”), presumably since the latter seemed too inadequate to express the status of Paul.

alienate”),³⁷³ appears only here and in Eph. 2:12 and 4:18, but the passive (used in all three cases) would be familiar in reference to human estrangement (Ps. 69[LXX 68]:8; Sir. 11:34), and to alienation from God by sin and idolatry (Ps. 58[LXX 57]:3; Ezek. 14:5, 7; Hos. 9:10). That human guilt and hostility are in view, and not nameless fate or inscrutable destiny, is clear from the supplementary description: “enemies in mind” and “in works that are wicked.” Paul previously had not hesitated to speak in such terms (“enemies [of God],” Rom. 5:10; 11:28), though δῖάνοια (like ἀπαλλοτριόω) occurs only here and in Eph. 2:3 and 4:18 in the Pauline corpus. In this case δῖάνοια has the force of “mind (as a kind of thinking), disposition, thought,” hence “hostile in attitude” (BAG³⁸D s.v. δῖάνοια 2), “in heart and mind” (NE³⁹B/RE⁴⁰B). It reflects the determined and self-sustained attitude illuminated in Rom. 1:21, where human creation, having disowned its creatureliness, finds a self-satisfying mode of existence in ignorance of God (1:21–32; the thought is close to Bar. 1:22). Consequently the “deeds” (see on 1:10) which such an attitude produces are “wicked” (cf. *Testament of Dan* 6:8 and *Testament of Asher* 6:5), where the stronger adjective πονηρός (“wicked, evil”; cf. Rom. 12:9 and 1 Thes. 5:22) is used rather than κακός (“bad”; as in Rom. 13:3).

If we take the parallel with Ephesians seriously we will have to recognize the words written here from a Jewish perspective (a conceptuality taken over from Jewish polemic against Gentiles; so Wolter 92). For in Ephesians the alienation is “from the body politic of Israel” and “the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12) as well as “from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). Consequently the “evil deeds” in mind can be characterized in terms of the indictment of Rom. 1:18–32 (see also on 3:5, 8; cf. *Psalms of Solomon* 17:13). At the same time we should recall that it is a cosmic alienation which is implied in 1:20 and that Paul elsewhere labored to persuade his fellow Jews that they, too, were guilty of defection from God’s way of making righteous (Rom. 2; 11:28).⁴¹⁴ Nevertheless, here the thought is directed specifically at “you (Gentiles),” with the implication that Israel’s relation with God models the relation to which all creation should aspire, as now the church (as the body of Christ) provides that model (1:18a, 24). At all events, it is not surprising that Gentile converts looking back to their old way of life should characterize it in strongly negative terms. Such an evaluation need not be self-justification by means of biographical reconstruction, but here presumably reflects the sense of having shifted from one realm (where the dominant force was evil and dark) to another (1:13; cf. Gal. 1:4). In such a decisive, final (eschatological) shift, the relative brightness

³⁷³ The passive participle means literally “having been given over to strangers,” so “estranged,” not “being foreigners,” as JB implies.

³⁸BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979)

³⁹NEB New English Bible

⁴⁰REB Revised English Bible

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Ezek. 14:5, 7, one expression of a regular warning that idolatry/following other gods results in Israel’s estrangement from God. It is precisely in this context that we might have expected some use of the alternative metaphor of justification/making righteous, since that metaphor so dominates Paul’s earlier presentation of a Jewish gospel for Gentiles (Romans 3–4; Galatians 3; Philippians 3; cf. even Eph. 2:8; 4:24).

and richness of life newly experienced “in Christ” would naturally make the old days seem much darker and illuminate their character as alienation (cf. Phil. 3:7–8).

1:22 νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου παραστῆσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ. The darker the past, the more dramatic the transition (see Lona 99–100). “But now” (νυνὶ δὲ) is a genuine Paulinism to express this moment of divine reversal (Rom. 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; 11:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Phm. 11; see also Col. 3:8 and Eph. 2:13; Heb. 9:26; see further Tachau). The theme of cosmic reconciliation is picked up from 1:20 (with the same verb; see on that verse) and personalized: “he (this same one ‘in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell’) has reconciled you.” Unlike 1:20, where the maintenance of the pattern of “in, through, to” resulted in the thought of reconciliation “to him” (that is, to Christ), the language here, freed from the poetic constraints of the hymn, reverts to the more typical Pauline thought of reconciliation through Christ to God (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18–20; see also Marshall 125–27; Martin, *Reconciliation* 125–26), but here with Christ as subject (though see n. ⁴²¹), as in Eph. 2:16 (Findeis 432–33). As in 1:13, the aorist tense (“has reconciled”) indicates the decisiveness of what happened on the cross, not the completion of the whole work of reconciliation (1:20). The reconciliation of Gentiles (to be also the church) is the first stage in the reconciliation of the world; note also the “not yet” note implied in the following παραστῆσαι, which is the objective of the act of reconciliation, as also in 1:28.

In this elaboration of the imagery of 1:20 the means of reconciliation are explained, as already alluded to in the (likely) addition in 1:20 (“through the blood of his cross”). Reconciliation happened “in the body of his flesh through (his) death.” This is the second occurrence of σῶμα (“body”) in the letter (after 1:18a), the second of one of the most fascinating kaleidoscopes of usage that we can imagine in a key Pauline category (see Dunn, “Body”). Here it clearly denotes the human body of Christ on the cross, though the “in” may be locative and not merely instrumental (cf. Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* 78 n. 181), denoting, that is, not merely the means of identification but also that identification with Christ which is at the heart of Paul’s “in Christ” (see on 1:2) and “suffering with Christ” motif (see on 1:24). The most striking variation at this point is the addition “of flesh” (as in the other reference to Christ’s body on the cross, 2:11), resulting in a phrase (τὸ σῶμα τῆς σαρκός, “body of flesh”) that occurs only in Colossians in the Pauline corpus.

The two words σὰρξ and σῶμα are characteristically Pauline (each occurs more than ninety times in the letters attributed to Paul, more than 60% of the New Testament usage of these words). And they never appear linked together elsewhere in Paul simply because their ranges of meaning overlap to such an extent. The basic distinction is that σῶμα denotes the fact of embodiment, that aspect of human (and other) existence which gives it place in its world and makes it possible for embodied entities to interact upon each other (so, e.g., 1 Cor. 6:16–18; 7:4), while σὰρξ is the material substance of which the body is composed in this world. It is

⁴²¹ The passive form ἀποκατηλλάγητε meets all the criteria to be counted as original: it is well supported (Ɱ⁴⁶ B), it explains the other readings, and it is the most difficult (following ὑμᾶς; Metzger 621–22). But since the second person passive fits so badly we may be justified in concluding that the early correction/improvement was wholly justified (cf. Lightfoot 249–50; Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* 72).

always important in trying to understand Paul to remember that σῶμα does not mean “physical body” as such. Thus, most clearly, the distinction he makes in 1 Cor. 15:44, between the body of this age, σῶμα ψυχικόν (“natural body”), and the resurrection body, σῶμα πνευματικόν (“spiritual body”), shows that different embodiments are necessary for different environments. Since in Hebrew anthropology disembodied existence was scarcely conceivable, transformation of the “body” was simply the means by which transition from this world to the next takes place (cf. Phil. 3:21). In contrast, “flesh” remains rootedly of this world, inextricably part of it, so that “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50). Nevertheless, since the embodiment of which Paul speaks most frequently is that within this world, a physical (three dimensional) world, the individual σῶμα in Paul does in fact usually denote physical body. A fair degree of overlap between “body” and “flesh” is therefore inevitable (see also on 2:1).

From the other side of the overlap between the two words in Paul, σὰρξ in its range of meaning quickly gathers to itself a characteristically negative note. The degree to which σὰρξ belongs to and is part of this world means that it shares this world’s weak, ephemeral character (contrast σῶμα, 2:17) and that its corruptibility leaves it ready prey to the powerful enticements of sin (classically expounded in Rom. 7:7–8:3). This negative tone is at its sharpest in Paul’s blunt antithesis between “flesh” and “Spirit” (Rom. 8:4–8; Gal. 5:16–17).⁴³⁵ In contrast, σῶμα as such is characteristically neutral and only rarely negative (Rom. 8:13 is exceptional).

The usage here, then, is unusual in that the unprecedented combination of these two terms looks almost tautologous. Almost as striking is the degree to which the second term, σὰρξ (“flesh”), initially and more frequently in this letter denotes mere physical presence or existence (1:22, 24; 2:1, 5, 11), with the negative notes more characteristic of Paul coming only in 2:13, 23 and 3:22, though “mind of flesh” in 2:18 is equally unprecedented in Paul (see on 2:18 end). Why then the unusual formulation here? Clearly, in Pauline terms, we can say that the more neutral term “body” is being qualified by the traditionally more negative term. However, that may mean here simply a heightening of the sense of mere physicality. In contrast to a heavenly existence in the form of Wisdom (1:15–17) and to a σῶμα identified either with the universe as a whole or with the church in particular (1:18a), the σῶμα with which Christ achieved his act of reconciliation was merely that of one single frail human being. “Of flesh” ensures that this σῶμα could never be confused with the σῶμα of 1:18. The negative here, then, would be the sharpness of the antithesis between glorious cosmic body and individual human frame stretched out in the agonizing humility of crucifixion (cf. the similar usage in 1QpHab 9:2; also 4QpNah/4Q169 2:6 = “corpse, carcass”).⁴⁴⁶ At any rate, intentional or not, such an emphasis would have been a bulwark against any Gnostic tendencies that attempted to question the

⁴³⁵ See further my “Jesus—Flesh and Spirit: An Exposition of Rom. 1:3–4,” *JTS* 24 (1973) 40–68.

⁴⁴⁶ The phrase also occurs in the Greek of Sir. 23:17 (ἄνθρωπος πόρνος ἐν σώματι σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ) and *I Enoch* 102:5 (τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν). See further Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* 64 n. 20. Since the contrast with 1:18 would be sufficient to explain “of flesh” here, it is less certain that a polemical overtone is present, directed against teaching current in Colossae (so Lightfoot 160; otherwise Abbott 226; Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* 78; R. P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* 67; O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* 68).

reality of Christ's death:⁴⁵⁷ the firstborn of all creation attained his status as firstborn from the dead by experiencing the full reality of physical death.

The divine act of reconciliation had two phases: the means ("in the body of his flesh through death") and the objective ("to present you holy ..."). The repetition of "you" underscores how personalized was the divine condescension; of course, it does not mean "you alone" but "you" among all the other "you"s, all of whom could count themselves the beneficiaries of personally characterized and directed grace. The imagery is drawn from cult and law court and reflects the degree to which these two powerful features of daily life in classical society were interwoven.

Παρίστημι ("present") here signifies a formal bringing before and presentation in the implied hope of acceptance and acknowledgment (as in 2 Cor. 4:14; 11:2; Eph. 5:27; 2 Tim. 2:15; see also 1:28). Thus it could be used both of offering a sacrifice (hence Rom. 12:1) and of bringing someone before a judge (hence Rom. 14:10; see BAG⁴⁶D s.v. 1d, e). Ἅγιος ("holy"), as we have already seen (1:2), also derives from the cult, denoting that which has been set apart, consecrated to God. Ἄμωμος ("without blemish or blame") is used most commonly in the LXX of the physical perfection required of the sacrificial animal (e.g., Exod. 29:1; Lev. 1:3, 10, etc.; Num. 6:14, etc.; Ezek. 43:22–25; 45:18, 23; 46:4–6, 13), though naturally such perfection became a metaphor for blamelessness before God (2 Sam. 22:24; Pss. 15:2; 18:23; 19:13, etc.). The same overtone carries over into New Testament use (Eph. 5:27; Phil. 2:15; Jude 24; Rev. 14:5; explicitly in Heb. 9:14 and 1 Pet. 1:19). The parallel is particularly close with Eph. 1:4: ἁγίους καὶ ἄμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ (κατενώπιον only in these two passages in the Pauline letters). Ἀνέγκλητος, though much less common in Jewish tradition (only 3 Macc. 5:31), is drawn directly from legal procedure: ἐγκαλέω is a legal technical term, "accuse, bring charges against" (BAG⁴⁷D s.v. ἐγκαλέω); so ἀνέγκλητος denotes one free of accusation or charge, hence "irreproachable, blameless" (cf. particularly 1 Tim. 3:10 and Tit. 1:6–7; elsewhere in Paul only in 1 Cor. 1:8).

There is implicit, then, an interplay between the idea of Christ's death as sacrifice (1:20) and the presentation of those who are as unblemished as a sacrifice to God. In other words, there is an echo of the Pauline idea of sacrificial interchange, where the spotless sacrifice by dying as a sin offering is somehow interchanged with the blameworthy sinner and its spotlessness transferred to the sinner (so most explicitly in 2 Cor. 5:21). This has been taken up in the imagery of formal presentation to judge or king or emperor, where it is the irreproachable character of those presented that guarantees their acceptance (the two elements nicely caught in NI⁴⁸V's "without blemish and free from accusation"). But it is clearly implicit that this acceptability has been made possible and guaranteed by the death of Christ. The sacrificial

⁴⁵⁷ According to Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19.6, Marcion did not include "of flesh" in his reading of Col. 1:22 and took "his body" to refer to the church.

⁴⁶BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979)

⁴⁷BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979)

⁴⁸NIV New International Bible

imagery is one way of explaining how that came about, but others will be offered shortly (see 2:11–15, 20; 3:1).

Also implicit is the suggestion that the presentation has not yet taken place and that it will be the final climax of God's saving purpose through Christ (otherwise Lightfoot 160–61; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* 65; Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 125). This is borne out by the immediately following note of caution (1:23) and the otherwise surprising indication in 1:24 that Christ's sufferings (on the cross) are as yet somehow incomplete.

20. ἀποκαταλλάξαι. The ἀπο may be intensive, "*prorsus reconciliare*," or, as in ἀποκαθιστάναι, may mean "again" (so Alford, Ell⁴⁹, Lightfoot, Soden). "*Conciliari extraneo possent, reconciliari vero non alii quam suo*," Tertull. *adv. Marc.* v. 19. But καταλλάσσειν is the word always used by St. Paul in Rom, and Cor. of reconciliation to God; and of a wife to her husband, 1 Cor. 7:11. See on Eph. 2:16.

τὰ πάντα, defined as it is presently after by εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, κ.τ.λ., cannot be limited to the Church (as Beza), nor to men (especially the heathen, Olshausen), nor yet to intelligent beings generally. "How far this restoration of universal nature may be subjective, as involved in the changed perceptions of man thus brought into harmony with God, and how far it may have an objective and independent existence, it were vain to speculate," Lightfoot. Compare ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων, Acts 3:21; also Rom. 8:21.

εἰς αὐτόν. If our interpretation of this were to be determined solely by considerations of language, we should have no hesitation in referring αὐτόν to the same antecedent as ἐν αὐτῷ δι' αὐτοῦ, and αὐτοῦ after σταυροῦ, that is Christ, and that, whatever subject we adopt for εὐδόκησε, but especially if πᾶν τὸ πλ. is not taken as the subject. On this interpretation the ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν would refer back to τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν ... ἔκτισται. If ἐαυτῷ was necessary in 2 Cor. 5:19, was it not more necessary here in order to avoid ambiguity?

It is, however, a serious objection to this view that we nowhere read of reconciliation to Christ, but only through Him to God.

This objection is, indeed, somewhat weakened by the consideration, first, that this is the only place in which the reconciliation of τὰ πάντα is mentioned. In 2 Cor. 5:19 the words which follow ἐαυτῷ, viz. μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν, κ.τ.λ., show that κόσμος has not the wide significance of τὰ πάντα here. Secondly, that already in ver. 17 there is predicated of Christ what elsewhere is predicated of God, viz. δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτόν τὰ πάντα (Rom. 11:35). Thirdly, here only is εἰς used instead of the dative after (ἀπο) καταλλάσσειν. The difference is slight, and only in the point of view; but the change would be accounted for by the reference to ver. 17

⁴⁹Ell. Ellicott.

It deserves notice that some expositors who reject this view use language which at least approximates to the idea of reconciliation to Christ. Thus Alford, speaking of the “sinless creation,” says it “is lifted into nearer participation and higher glorification of Him, and is thus *reconciled*, though not in the strictest yet in a very intelligible and allowable sense.”

If πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα is the subject, and αὐτόν be viewed as = τὸν Θεόν, this antecedent would be supplied from πᾶν τὸ πλ. in which, on this view, it is involved. On the other hand, if the subject of εὐδόκησε is ὁ Θεός understood, this, of course, is the antecedent. But the reference of αὐτόν (reflexive) to an unexpressed subject is harsh, notwithstanding Jas. 1:12.

εἰρηνοποιήσας belongs to the subject of the verb, the masc. being adopted κατὰ σύνεσιν, as in 2:19. This was inevitable, since the personal character of ὁ εἰρηνοποιήσας could not be lost sight of.

As it is Christ who is specified in Eph. 2:15 as ποιῶν εἰρηνην, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Oecum. and many moderns, although making ὁ Θεός the subject of εὐδόκησε, have so understood εἰρηνοποιήσας here “by the common participial anacoluthon” but this is a very harsh separation of the participial clause from the finite verb, and introduces confusion amongst the pronouns.

δι’ αὐτοῦ, repeated for the sake of emphasis, “by Him, I say.” This repetition, especially in so pointed a connexion with τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς and τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, still further emphasises the fact that angelic mediators have no share in the work of reconciliation, nay, that these heavenly beings themselves are included amongst those to whom the benefit of Christ’s work extends.

The second δι’ αὐτοῦ is read by κ A C D^{bc} K P and most MSS⁵⁰., Syr. (both) Boh⁵¹., Chrys., Theodoret. It is omitted by B D* G L, Old Lat., Vulg., Ar⁵²m, Eth⁵³., Theophyl., Ambrosiaster, *al.* There would be a tendency to omit them as superfluous.

εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, εἴτε τὰ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. There is much diversity of opinion as to the interpretation of this passage; “torquet interpretes,” says Davenant, “*et vicissim ab illis torquetur.*” First, are we to understand τὰ πάντα as limited to intelligent creatures, or as including also unreasoning and lifeless things? Alford, Meyer, and many others adopt the latter view, which, indeed, Alford says is “clearly” the apostle’s meaning. Rom. 8:19–22 is compared, where it is said that the κτίσις has been made subject to ματαιότης. But it is not easy to see how the reversal of this ματαιότης or the delivery from the δουλεία τῆς φθορᾶς can be called “reconciliation to God.” Reconciliation implies enmity, and this cannot be predicated of unreasoning and lifeless things. The neuter τὰ πάντα does not bind us to this interpretation, it is simply the most concise and striking expression of universality. But, further, what is meant by the reconciliation of heavenly beings? Many commentators suppose the meaning to be that even good angels have need to be in some sense “reconciled.” Calvin observes: “*duabus de causis Angelos quoque oportuit cum Deo pacificari: nam quum creaturae sint, extra lapsus periculum non erant, nisi Christi gratia fuissent confirmati ... Deinde in hac ipsa obedientia*

⁵⁰MSS. manuscripts

⁵¹Boh. Bohairic. Cited by Tisch. as “Coptic,” by Tregelles as “Memphitic,” by WH. as “me.”

⁵²Arm Armenian.

⁵³Eth. Ethiopic.

quam praestant Deo, non est tam exquisita perfectio ut Deo omni ex parte et citra veniam satisfaciat. Atque huc procul dubio spectat sententia ista ex libro Job (4:18). 'In Angelis suis reperiet iniquitatem'; nam si de diabolo exponitur, quid magnam? pronuntiat autem illic Spiritus Summam puritatem sordere, si ad Dei iustitiam exigatur." Similarly De Wette, Bleek, Huther, Alford, Moule. The last named adopts Alford's statement: "No reconciliation must be thought of which shall resemble *ours* in its process, for Christ took not upon Him the seed of angels, nor paid any propitiatory penalty in the root of their nature.... But forasmuch as He is their Head as well as ours ... it cannot be but that the great event in which He was glorified through suffering should also bring them nearer to God.... That such increase [of blessedness] might be described as a *reconciliation* is manifest: we know from Job 15:15 that 'the heavens are not clean in His sight'; and *ib.* 4:18, 'His angels He charged [charges] with folly.' " The general truth may be admitted without accepting Eliphaz the Temanite as a final authority. But imperfection is not enmity, and the difficulty is in the application of the term "reconciled" in the sense of "lifted into nearer participation and higher glorification" of God. Davenant, followed by Alexander, says that Christ has reconciled angels "analogically, by taking away from them the possibility of falling."

It is hardly necessary to dwell on the opinion of Origen, that the devil and his angels are referred to; or on that of Beza, van Til, *al.*, that τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς are the souls of those who died in the Lord before the coming of Christ, and who are supposed to have been admitted into heaven by virtue of His work which was to come. Neither opinion has any support in Scripture. (Bengel notes that Πάντα "*continet etiam defunctos,*" but does not suppose them referred to as in heaven.)

A better view is that of Harless (adopted also by Reuss, Oltramare, *al.*), according to which the reconciliation proper applies only to τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, but the apostle adds τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρ., "not as if there were in heaven any real need of redemption, nor as if heaven were only added as a rhetorical figure, but because the Lord and Creator of the whole body, whose members are heaven and earth, in restoring one member has restored the whole body; and herein consists the greatest significance of the reconciliation, that it is not only the restoration of the earthly life, but the restoration of the harmony of the universe" (Harless, *Eph.* p. 53).

Ritschl thinks that St. Paul refers to the angels concerned in the giving of the law, to whom he believes the apostle here and elsewhere attributes a certain lack of harmony with the Divine plan of redemption (*Jahrb. f. Deutsche Theol.* 1863, p. 522 f.). Compare 2:15.

Meyer's solution is that the reference is to angels as a category, not as individuals. The original normal relation between God and these higher spirits no longer subsists so long as the hostile realm of demons still exists; whose power has indeed been broken by the death of the Lord, but which shall be fully destroyed at the Parousia.

Hammond argues at considerable length that "heaven and earth" was a Hebrew expression for "this lower earth." Chrysostom takes the accusatives to depend on εἰρηνοποίησας. This is clear from his question, τὰ δὲ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς πῶς εἰρηνοποίησε; His reply is that the angels had been made hostile to men, seeing their Lord insulted (or as Theodoret more generally says, on account of the wickedness of the many). God, then, not only made things on earth to be at peace, but brought man to the angels, him who was their enemy. This was profound peace. Why then, says the apostle, have ye confidence in the angels? So far are they from bringing you near, that had not God Himself reconciled you to them, ye would not have been at peace. So

Augustine (*Enchir.* 62): “*pacificantur coelestia cum terrestribus, et terrestria cum coelestibus.*” Erasmus adopts the same construction, amending the Latin version thus: “*pacificatis et iis quae in terra sunt, et quae in coelis.*” Bengel’s interpretation is similar, and he appears to adopt the same construction, for he compares Luke 19:38, εἰρήνη ἐν οὐρανῷ: and comparing this again with Luke 2:14, ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη, he remarks that what those in heaven call peace on earth, those on earth call peace in heaven. This construction does not seem to be open to any grammatical objection. Only two instances of εἰρηνοποιεῖν are cited in the Lexicons, one from the Sept., Prov. 10:10, where it is intransitive; the other from Hermes, *ap. Stob. Ecl. Phys.* p. 984, where the middle is used transitively, τότε καὶ αὐτὴ τὸν ἴδιον δρόμον εἰρηνοποιεῖται. As to the form of the compound, Aristotle uses ὁδοποιεῖν with an accusative, *Rhet.* i. 1. 2, δῆλον ὅτι εἴη ἂν αὐτὰ καὶ ὁδοποιεῖν. So λογοποιεῖν takes an accus., *e.g.* συμφοράς, *Lys.* p. 165, 26; cf. *Thuc.* vi. 38, *al.* It is singular that this construction which yields an excellent sense has been entirely overlooked, and the interpretation of Chrys., etc., met with the objection that ἀποκαταλλάξαι ... εἴτε τὰ ... εἴτε τὰ cannot mean to reconcile these two with one another.

May it not be that the difficulty arises from attempting to turn what is practically a hypothetical statement into a categorical assertion? St. Paul has in his mind throughout this part of the Epistle the teaching of the false teachers at Colossae, who knew, forsooth, all about the celestial hierarchy, with its various orders, some of which were doubtless regarded as not entirely in harmony with the Divine will. The apostle no more adopts their view here than he adopts their hierarchical system. The point on which he insists is that all must be brought into harmony, and that this is effected through Christ.

Are we, however, justified in assuming that all τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (which is not necessarily equivalent to “in heaven”) are holy angels, or were so conceived by St. Paul? If there are “other worlds than ours,” would not their inhabitants be reckoned as ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς?

21–23. *The Colossians are reminded that this reconciliation applies to them also, and that the object in view is that they may be blameless in the sight of God. But this depends on their holding fast by the truth which they have been taught*

21. We must first note the difference of reading in the last word of the verse. ἀποκαταλλάγητε is read by B, 17 (ἀποκατηλλάκηται); ἀποκαταλλαγέντες by D* G, the Latin d g m Goth., Iren. (transl.) *al.*; but all other authorities have ἀποκατήλλαξεν. Lachm., Meyer, Lightfoot, Weiss adopt ἀποκατηλλάγητε, which is given a Place in the margin by Treg⁵⁴, WH⁵⁵. and Rev. It is argued that ἀποκαταλλαγέντες is an emendation, for grammatical reasons, of ἀποκατηλλάγητε (though a careless one, for it should be accus.). These two sets of authorities, then, may be taken together as attesting the Passive. As between ἀποκατηλλάγητε and ἀποκατήλλαξεν, there is in favour of the former the consideration that, if the latter had been the original reading, the construction would be Plain, and no reason would exist for altering it. Lightfoot regards this reading of B as perhaps the highest testimony of all to the great value of that MS.

With the reading ἀποκατήλλαξεν there is a slight anacoluthon, there being no direct protasis. Examples, however, are not infrequent of a clause with δέ following a participle which indirectly supplies the protasis. The anacoluthon might indeed be avoided by making ὑμᾶς depend on ἀποκαταλλάξαι; but this would be more awkward; and, besides, ver. 21 obviously begins a new Paragraph, resuming the thought from which the apostle had digressed in 15.

⁵⁴Treg. Tregelles.

⁵⁵WH. Westcott and Hort.

With the reading ἀποκατηλλάγητε it is possible to regard the clause νυνὶ δὲ—θανάτου as parenthetical. “And you who once were estranged (but now ye have been reconciled) to present you, I say,” the second ὑμᾶς repeating the first; and so Lachmann, Lightfoot, Moule. But, considering the importance of the clause, it is perhaps better (with Meyer) to understand the construction as an anacoluthon, the apostle having begun the sentence with the active in his mind, and, in a manner not unusual with him, passing to a more independent form of statement. This, too, seems much more in St. Paul’s manner than the parenthesis supposed by Lachmann.

καὶ ὑμᾶς, “and you also,” **ποτὲ ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους**, “who were once in a state of estrangement.” ὄντας expresses more forcibly the settledness of the alienation. For ἀπαλλοτριῶ see on Eph. 2:12. Here the remote object must be God, as of its opposite ἀποκατάλλασσιν, and the word implies that they belonged to another (ἀλλότριος) (they were, in fact, subject to the ἐξουσία τοῦ σκοτούς), and that this was the consequence of movement away from Him (ἀπο-) Alford understands the verb here objectively, “banished”; but it seems more congruous to the whole context (ἀποκαταλ., ἐχθρούς) to understand it subjectively, “estranged (in mind).”

ἐχθρούς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐχθρούς is taken passively by Meyer, “*invisos Deo.*” But such a meaning is not justified either by the context here or by the use of the word elsewhere; cf. Rom. 8:7, τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς Θεόν. Even in Rom. 5:10, εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ Θεῷ, κ.τ.λ., it is best understood actively; there, as here, the sinner is spoken of as reconciled to God, not God to the sinner. Indeed, nowhere in the N.T. is the latter expression used. The fact that it occurs in Clement, in the *Const. Apost.*, and in the Apocrypha (Meyer), only makes its absence from the N.T. the more noticeable. As Lightfoot observes, “it is the mind of man, not the mind of God, which must undergo a change, that a reunion may be effected.” It was not because God hated the world, but because He loved it, that He sent His Son. In Rom. 11:28, where the Jews are said to be ἐχθροὶ in a passive sense, this is not absolute, but κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, and they are at the same time ἀγαπητοί. Here, in particular, the active sense is required by the following τῇ διανοίᾳ, which Meyer indeed interprets as a “causal dative” (as if it were = διὰ τὴν διανοίαν). But in ἐχθρὸς τῇ διανοίᾳ the two notions must have the same subject (ὑμῶν not being added). Besides, if so intended, διανοίᾳ would surely be qualified by πονηρᾶ or the like. τῇ διανοίᾳ then, is the dative of the part affected, as in ἐσκοτωμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ Eph. 4:18; καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, Matt. 5:8.

ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς, the practical sphere in which the preceding characteristics exhibited themselves. A striking contrast to the description of the Christian walk in ver. 10.

22. νυνὶ δέ, “now,” *i.e.* in the present order of things, not “at the present moment.” The aorist marks that the state of things followed a given event. It is correctly rendered by the English perfect. So ver. 26; also Eph. 2:13, 3:5; Rom. 5:11, 7:6, 11:30, 31, 16:26; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Pet. 1:10, 2:10, 25. We have the aorist similarly used in Plato, *Symp.* 193 A, πρὸ τοῦ, ὥσπερ λέγω, ἐν ἡμεν· νυνὶ δὲ διὰ τὴν ἀδικίαν διωκίσθημεν ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, and in Isaeus, *De Cleon. her.* 20, τότε μὲν ... νυνὶ δὲ ... ἐβουλήθη.

ἀποκατηλλάγητε or **ἀποκατήλλαξεν**. For reading and construction, see above.

ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, ἐν pointing to the medium of the reconciliation. The addition of τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, “consisting in His flesh,” has been variously accounted for. Beza, Huther, Barry, *al.*, suppose the expression directed against Docetism; but there is no direct evidence of this form of error so early, nor does there appear to be any allusion to it in this

Epistle. Others, as Bengel, Olshausen, Lightfoot, supposed the words added to distinguish between the physical and the spiritual σῶμα, *i.e.* the Church. But this would be irrelevant. Marcion, however, omitted τῆς σαρκός as inconsistent with his views, and explained ἐν τῷ σώματι of the Church. Tertullian, referring to this, says: “*in eo corpore in quo mori potuit per carnem mortuus est, non per ecclesiam sed propter ecclesiam*” (*Adv. Marc.* v. 19). The most probable explanation is that the words have reference to the opinion of the false teachers, that angels who were without a σῶμα τῆς σαρκός assisted in the work of reconciliation (so Alford, Ellicott, Meyer, Soden). διὰ τοῦ θανάτου expresses the manner in which the reconciliation was wrought.

After θανάτου, αὐτοῦ is added in κ A P *al.*, Boh⁵⁶., Arm⁵⁷., *al.*

παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς. With the reading ἀποκατήλλαξεν this infinitive expresses the final purpose; comp. 2 Cor. 11:2, ἡρμοσάμην ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἀνδρί, παρθένον ἀγνήν παραστήσαι τῷ Χριστῷ. Here, however, the verb has its judicial sense; comp. 2 Cor. 4:14, ὁ ἐγείρας τὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἡμᾶς σὺν Ἰησοῦ ἐγερεῖ καὶ παραστήσει σὺν ὑμῖν. As this παραστήσαι is thus included by God Himself in His work as the consequence of the reconciliation which He has accomplished, it follows that there is no room for anything to be contributed to this end by man himself.

With the reading ἀποκατηλλάγητε two constructions are possible. First, it may be taken as dependent on εὐδόκησέ, νυνὶ δέ—θανάτου being parenthetical (Lightfoot). This makes the sentence rather involved. Or, secondly, the subject of παραστήσαι and that of ἀποκατ. may be the same, viz. ὑμεῖς, “*ut sisteretis vos.*” Comp. Rom. 6:13, παραστήσατε ἑαυτοὺς τῷ Θεῷ 2 Tim. 2:15, σπούδασον σεαυτὸν δόκιμον παραστήσαι τῷ Θεῷ. There is here no emphasis on the reflexive sense (the words being nearly equivalent to “that ye may stand”), so that ἑαυτοὺς is not required.

Lightfoot regards παραστήσαι here as sacrificial, paraphrasing thus: “He will present you a living sacrifice, an acceptable offering to Himself.” But this is reading into the words something which is not suggested, nor even favoured, by the context. Though ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους may seem to be borrowed from the vocabulary of sacrifice, the combination does not carry any such connotation with it. Comp. Eph. 1:4 (ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς) εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ; *ib.* ver. 23 (in connexion with the same verb παραστήσαι, where the figure is that of a bride); Jude 24, στήσαι κατενώπιον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἀμώμους. ἀνεγκλήτους, moreover, is not suitable to sacrifice. It is a judicial term, and thus determines the sense of the other two, παραστήσαι being quite as much a judicial as a sacrificial word; cf. Acts 23:33. May we not add that the thought expressed in Lightfoot’s paraphrase has no parallel in the N.T.? For Rom. 12:1 does not support the idea of God presenting believers to Himself as a sacrifice. Accordingly, this view is rejected by most commentators. The adjectives, then, are best understood of moral and spiritual character, the first expressing the positive aspect, the others

⁵⁶Boh. Bohairic. Cited by Tisch. as “Coptic,” by Tregelles as “Memphitic,” by WH. as “me.”

⁵⁷Arm. Armenian.

the negative; and *κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ* being connected with the verb, which requires such an addition, not with the adjectives, nor with the last only.⁵⁸

In Col 1:20 the common understanding of reconciliation must be broadened. At the most basic level, reconciliation means the restoring of a broken relationship. Typically in Scripture it involves persons because the Bible was written to transform human life. Reconciliation usually involves two prerequisites: Both parties must have a willingness to be reconciled, and there must be an occasion that brings them together. God has demonstrated his willingness and provided the occasion by taking the initiative to send Jesus as reconciler. The willingness is produced by the work of the Holy Spirit. A felt need, often prompted by circumstances of life, provides the occasion. Thus reconciliation is normally voluntary and volitional.

Here, however, reconciliation involves more than a voluntary movement. The natural creation was subjected to sin “not by its own choice” (Rom 8:20), and its reconciliation will be of God’s choosing in his time. Regarding the spirits, in Col 2:15 Paul employed the language of warfare in stating that the spirit powers will be subdued by Christ.¹⁰⁵⁹⁷ Their ultimate destiny was settled when they chose either to rebel or submit to God’s glory in eternity past.¹⁰⁶⁰⁸ Now, God offers no possibility of renewal to those who rebelled, presumably because they had a full knowledge of God when they chose sin.¹⁰⁶¹⁹ Now they live in an intermediate time in which they exercise limited powers of rebellion. Some day, however, that will cease. The work of Christ’s death will be applied completely to them.

As regards the human world, there is the possibility of a voluntary reconciliation; but for those who are not reconciled to Christ there is the sentence of death (2 Cor 2:14–16). Thus reconciliation may be effected by voluntary submission to Jesus, which brings the blessings of salvation, or by involuntary submission, being conquered by the power of his might. Reconciliation must be defined in this context, therefore, as all things being put into proper relation to Christ. Those who respond to his voice will be brought into a relationship of grace and blessing. Those who oppose and reject him will receive eternal punishment involving removal from God’s blessings and the active outpouring of his judgment. In the end, everyone

⁵⁸ Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s sons, 1909), 220–227.

⁵⁹¹⁰⁷ The setting of that text is drawn from the language of battle in which Christ is seen as the conqueror disarming and pacifying his enemies.

⁶⁰¹⁰⁸ The theme of fallen spirits permeates first-century Jewish literature (see note 104). It makes its way into Scripture in the New Testament in such passages as 1 Pet 3:19 and Jude 6.

⁶¹¹⁰⁹ When Adam and Eve sinned, they had a precise and accurate knowledge of God, but it was not the same as the spirit beings who saw God with clear, “spiritual vision.” If God’s grace toward humans can be explained by reason (which is highly unlikely), perhaps this is the way. The sinful act of humans was not as insightful as the rebellion of spirit beings. Therefore, it was not a final act in the same sense. God offers to humans a chance of renewal.

and everything will be reconciled in this sense.¹¹⁶²⁰ Everyone and everything will be subordinated to Christ.¹¹⁶³¹

The means of reconciliation is described in another rather strange expression for Paul, “by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (1:20). The Greek text has a more direct statement, “through the blood of his cross.” Several aspects of this statement demand attention. First, the blood of the cross points to the theology of the blood atonement which runs throughout Scripture and speaks of the radical death of Jesus (blood actually flowed from the body). Second, it identifies the substitutionary aspects of the death of Christ by recalling the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament, which were substitutionary in nature. Third, the expression identifies blood with the cross. Paul did not often put blood and the cross together. For him, they were synonymous: Each stands for the other. Although Rom 3:21–31 reveals that the two may occur together, to find the two in one statement emphasizes Paul’s thought. The use of “blood” dramatically pointed to the blood which was shed at Christ’s death. The emphasis is no doubt physical and theological. It is physical in that the terms “blood” and “death” point to the real experiences of human beings. It is theological in that Paul calls to mind the history of the blood tradition in Israel.

The peace achieved through the death of Jesus is an objective peace. It is the peace of relationships, not feelings. Although the human heart cries for feelings of peace, the deep need is for a relationship of peace. When relationships are correct, feelings follow. Here, as generally for Paul, the peace brings order and harmony into what is otherwise chaotic and distorted. The reconciliation of all things, as interpreted here, suggests that the peace is the restoring of harmony to all things, the many dimensions of existence (“things on earth or things in heaven”). Paul identified restored order often as a result of the work of Christ. It applied to individuals in Rom 5:1, where the peace *with* God is the immediate result of justification. It applied corporately in relationships in Eph 2:11ff., where peace between races is a result of the work of Christ. Here, Paul expressed the cosmic aspects of the harmony effected by the cross.

Significantly, an act in time and space had repercussions beyond both time and space. Jesus’ death at a specific point in time and in the physical dimension of life affected beings outside of time who live in the spiritual dimensions of existence. Thus there is a unity of the two worlds, physical and spiritual. They are reconciled in an act of time, and peace is forever established.¹¹⁶⁴² From a theological perspective, therefore, there is a unity between the two. Unity is effected by divine creation, observed in God’s intervention into the world through miracles and the incarnation, and solidified in redemption. Creation is the handiwork of God, and the Christian should understand the unity of all things in Christ. Elsewhere Paul reflected on this theme in 1

⁶²¹¹⁰ For a helpful study of this aspect of reconciliation, see P. O’Brien, “Col. 1:20 and the Reconciliation of all Things,” *RTR* 33 (1974): 45–53, and *Colossians, Philemon*, 53–57. Of the many ideas suggested by scholars, the position above is in harmony with the conclusions of O’Brien who quoted Lohse approvingly that the “universe has been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back into their divinely created and determined order ... the universe is again under its head and ... cosmic peace has returned.” (*Colossians, Philemon*, 56; Lohse, 59).

⁶³¹¹¹ Note the parallel in Phil 2:5–11. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.

⁶⁴¹¹² This has a bearing on what the philosophers call the empirical or phenomenal and numinal or spiritual dimensions. No matter what identifying term is used, they are viewed here as a harmony and the work of Christ spans both realms.

Cor 15:25–28 and Phil 2:9–11. These cosmic dimensions are as much a part of the gospel as are the personal.

In this discussion of reconciliation, Paul had two basic reference points. First was the beginning of restoration, which occurred at the cross. The death of Christ provided the objective basis upon which all else followed. Thus Paul looked backward in time, resting his hopes on what was done in Christ. Second was the culmination of reconciliation which will take place in the future. Paul expressed by faith this necessary outworking of the death of Jesus. Thus Jesus died not only to provide individuals with salvation but also to restore a harmony to the universe. That harmony is an assured aspect of redemption.

Christians are wrong to wait only for the new cosmic order. Because of this expectation, Christians must have an ecological sensitivity. The world belongs to God. When creation is damaged or creatures become extinct, the world loses a picture of God. With each of these, less of God is known and, therefore, less knowledge is available through natural revelation. Equally, since creation is destined to glorify Christ, Christians must work to encourage that now. Wise care and use of physical resources are in harmony with the Christian world view.¹¹⁶⁵³

The hymn to Christ has a much broader application beyond the Colossian situation. Grand themes are addressed which provide a theological overview within which readers can find themselves. The contextual key that opened Paul to this lofty description of the person and work of Christ is vv. 12–14, the description of the kingdom of Jesus, the “Son he loves,” and the believers’ place in that kingdom. All Christians may legitimately see themselves exactly as the Colossians did: as sharers in the kingdom of God. By virtue of belonging to the King, the blessings of the kingdom are available. The specific application to the Colossian church will be made in the verses which follow.

Before departing this passage, an identification of the major theological themes will summarize the section well. First, God’s will is known because of and through the work of Christ on the cross. Second, God has caused Christ to rule. He has enthroned him. He rules supreme over creation and redemption, over the world and the church. Third, all of existence is united in Christ. There is unity and order in creation and redemption. Paul laid the foundations of a Christian view of ecology. Fourth, Jesus is the central figure in creation and redemption. Fifth, ultimately, redemption means that Jesus will present a restored and ordered creation to God the Father. The function of the second person of the Godhead is to administrate the affairs of earth and to subdue those who resist. Finally, Jesus is the God-man and the mediator between man and God. There is no need for another (this argument is clear in 2:8ff.).

(4) The Salvation of the Colossians (1:21–23)

²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²²But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—²³if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel

⁶⁵¹¹³ Other applications grow out of this world view as well. For example, this means that there is an integration of all of life so that a Christian should enjoy nature and use it as God intended. The theological principle has far-reaching ramifications.

that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Having spoken of the universal and cosmic nature of the work of Christ, Paul applied it specifically to the church at Colossae. The content resembles Eph 2:1–11, where many of the same terms, phrases, and ideas are employed.

In applying the work of Christ, Paul used a historical sequence of their lives before and after salvation. In the Greek text, these ideas are expressed in one long sentence, demonstrating the unity of thought found here. The NIV separates the sentence into three sentences which correspond to the basic flow of the Greek.

THE COLOSSIANS' FORMER CONDITION (1:21)

Paul reminded the Colossians of the blessings of reconciliation by recalling their condition before salvation. Two descriptions provided insight and focused their thoughts.

1:21a This context deals with reconciliation. When Paul used the term “alienation,” it obviously meant that at one time the Colossians had been outside the sphere of God’s blessing. In Eph 2:12 Paul used the same term and form (perfect passive participle) to express the relationship to the “commonwealth of Israel” (NASB). No doubt the same meaning applies here. The Colossian Christians were alienated from the hope of Israel. Israel looked for the hope of salvation through a Messiah. The Gentiles had no such expectation. Thus the wonder of God’s working is expressed. Israel was the focus of God’s redemptive plan as his covenant people. Now, through Christ, the Gentiles also became participants in these covenant blessings. The spiritual meaning is more significant than the political metaphor. The Colossians “were once continuously and persistently out of harmony with God.”¹¹⁶⁶⁴

1:21b The Colossians also had been “enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior” (1:21). Paul identified both the source and effect of their disposition toward God. Three key terms present a package revealing their former situation. “Enemies,” while a strong term, occurs in Scripture to describe the contrast between God and those who do not do his will (Rom 5:10; Jas 4:4). The word has an active connotation. They made themselves enemies.¹¹⁶⁷⁵ The second significant term is “mind.”¹¹⁶⁸⁶ In the LXX the term is usually translated “heart,”¹¹⁶⁹⁷ and the terms in the New Testament speak of a person’s disposition. Actions naturally arise from the disposition, which is a matter of the mind/heart. Paul explicitly stated as much in Rom 1:18–32, where he wrote that inaccurate thoughts about God produce ungodly conduct. The disposition may be good or bad, and the context in which it occurs determines the attitude the writer wishes to convey. Here in Colossians the disposition is negative, anti-God, and counter to the best interests of the individuals themselves. The third important idea is “evil behavior.”

⁶⁶¹¹⁴ O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 66. The perfect passive verb with the present of εἰμί, a periphrastic construction, provides this meaning.

⁶⁷¹¹⁵ In contrast to R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1952), 1:286. A good discussion of the term occurs in W. Foerster, *TDNT*, 2:814.

⁶⁸¹¹⁶ The Greek is διάνοια. Here it is a dative of reference so that the text is “with reference to the mind, by their evil works.”

⁶⁹¹¹⁷ Cf. Gen 8:21; 17:17; 24:45; 27:41; and others which are documented by J. Behm, *TDNT*, 4:965.

Although the NIV translates the phrase “because of your evil behavior,” the causal element requires explanation. Paul characterized the mind (disposition) as evil, and the evidence he used was their evil works. The cause of their sinfulness was not their evil deeds; their evil deeds came from their sinfulness. That seems clear enough here and in Eph 2. Evil works simply reveal the heart of the matter, which is the mind/ disposition. Before becoming Christians, the Colossians were enemies of God because their mind/disposition was to do evil. An axiom of Scripture is that “by their fruit you will recognize them” (Matt 7:16); so here the mind produced the fruit of actions.

The former condition was desperate. These Gentiles were far removed from the promises of God’s blessings. Further, their minds were opposed to God, their actions were evil rather than good, and they willingly assumed an anti-God posture. They were God’s enemies. In such a condition, the possibility of reconciliation seemed remote. They would not naturally choose another course of action. That was their former condition. God took the initiative to change all of that. The simple reminder of who they used to be served to bring adoration and renewed commitment to the Lord who changed their lives.

THE COLOSSIANS’ PRESENT CONDITION (1:22–23)

The present condition is one of reconciliation: they were reconciled.¹¹⁷⁰⁸ In 1:12 God the Father initiated their salvation; here God the Son does. The Colossians owed their salvation to the initiative of God in their lives. Paul stated that by virtue of their faith in Christ they had already experienced reconciliation. They had voluntarily responded to the lordship of Christ and experienced peace with God. In that sense, they participated in the new order of redemption, as firstfruits along with Jesus himself. They had new values, motivations, and outlooks.

Paul discussed in these verses two related matters which continued the thought of previous sections. These are the means of the reconciliation of the Colossians and the purpose of their reconciliation.

1:22a Paul naturally and easily moved from the discussion of salvation to the means of achieving it: “by Christ’s physical body through death.” This common expression reveals the importance of the death of Christ for Pauline theology. The terminology is similar to that of the hymn, but the language is more expressive. There can be no doubt that he was making direct application of the previous discussion of reconciliation in the second stanza of the hymn (1:20).

Paul used sacrificial terminology to describe the way reconciliation occurred. First, reconciliation involved a physical sacrifice: “by Christ’s physical body.” Resuming and applying the language of 1:20, Paul expressed the truth that moral and spiritual changes come because of the death of Christ. In 1:20 Paul spoke of the reconciliation of all things through Christ’s death. Here, he spoke of the reconciliation of individuals through Christ’s physical body. Perhaps arguing against those who claimed that Jesus had no physical body, Paul explicitly spoke of the

⁷⁰¹¹⁸ There is a textual variant here between the aorist active and passive verb “reconcile.” The difference is whether or not “he” (Christ) or “you” (Colossians) is the subject and point of reference. The data is difficult to determine, although the active form seems to fit the context well. Ultimately the thought is unaffected, but the emphases are different. The NIV follows the active reading.

physical nature of the sacrifice.¹¹⁷¹⁹ What was done redemptively was done in the body and through the body.¹²⁷²⁰

Reconciliation involved not only a physical sacrifice but also a total sacrifice. Paul's phrase "through death" emphasizes the reality and totality of the sacrifice. The death of Christ is as necessary to the gospel as the resurrection. Together, the "physical body" and "death" reveal the physical suffering of Christ in redemption. Flesh, blood, and death express the total nature of the sacrifice.

1:22b Paul always kept the purpose of reconciliation in mind: "to present you holy in his sight." Rather than focusing on the doxological purpose, that of bringing praise to God's glory, as in Eph 1:6, 12, 14, Paul envisioned the completeness of character appropriate to those who trust Christ. The two ideas, of course, are complementary. God is best glorified among those who have cooperated with his working and whose lives reveal true Christian character. The latter emphasis countered those who would lapse into careless Christian living. This was a real danger that threatened the Colossians.

Paul expressed the time for presenting these converts to Christ in eschatological terminology. The future time will be the time of the Parousia, when Christ returns to the earth. At that point in time, Paul hoped the Colossian believers would have true Christian character. The future aspect of this is confirmed by the conditional statement "if you continue" (v. 23). Paul saw a time lapse between the present and the future time of presenting his converts to Christ. The dual historical reference points in Paul's theology emerge again. The past, the cross, must be viewed in light of the future, the reconciliation of all things. Similarly, the past for Christians, their salvation, must be viewed against the backdrop of the future, their meeting God after the course of history has been run.

In addition to the future time element of this event, Paul's thoughts turned to the character expected of the believer. Three statements describe it: "holy in his sight," "without blemish," and "free from accusation." Scholars have taken Paul's language in three ways: sacrificially, judicially, or generally. The first two statements of the verse recall the language of animal sacrifice. Every animal offered to God had to be holy and without flaw. (This terminology led some scholars to think in terms of a sacrificial setting for the entire passage.¹²⁷³¹) Such terms as "present," "holy," and "blameless" support this conclusion. If that analogy is correct, Paul thought of Jesus as the great examiner who will inspect the Christian to determine his suitability for sacrifice. However, Paul's use of sacrificial language has present implications rather than future. This is clearly seen in Rom 12:1–2 where Paul commanded believers to present their

⁷¹¹¹⁹ Those who see an incipient Gnostic setting will note that the argument counters the Gnostic claim that Jesus only appeared to have a body. Regardless of whether there is a Gnostic orientation, this particular wording stresses the importance of the flesh in the sacrifice of Christ

⁷²¹²⁰ The literal phrase "body of his flesh" is no doubt a Hebraism as was commonly used in Qumran, as Lohse, 64, n. 20, supported convincingly. As to the word "body" (*sōma*) in Paul's use, the work of R. Gundry, *SOMA in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (SNTSMS 29; Cambridge: University Press, 1976) should be consulted. He makes a strong case for the term having a physical meaning in Paul's usage.

⁷³¹²¹ E.g., Lightfoot, 160–61. Other passages, such as Rom 12:2, support Paul's use of sacrificial terminology.

bodies as living sacrifices. That is the natural response to the mercies of God. In this context, the language looks forward to the return of Christ.

Other scholars have suggested a judicial setting for this idea. They point out that the phrase “free from accusation” overrides and interprets the others. “Free from accusation” is a judicial term. It pictures a judge declaring a person innocent. This is a better understanding because Paul clearly taught that each believer would stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give account. He lived with an expectation of that day. Nevertheless, there is little to commend the judicial idea in the language of this particular passage.

Rather than pressing the sacrificial or judicial ideas, it seems better to take the words in a general sense. Lohse interpreted the words in this way. He stated that Paul considered “the Christians’ present lives are lived in God’s presence.... God’s act of reconciliation has already accomplished everything; perfection is thus not to be gained by one’s striving. Rather, perfection is there to be received as God’s gift and to be verified in the life of the Christians.”¹²⁷⁴² He correctly noted the impact of the completed work of Christ. Two other factors must be considered.⁷⁵

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 (vs⁷⁶. 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

⁷⁴122 Lohse, 65

⁷⁵ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 226–233.

⁷⁶vs. versus

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 NI⁷⁷V’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** (*anenklētous*). 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, κ⁷⁸v), but Christ is their “Advocate” (1 John 2:1, κ⁷⁹v) or “Defense” (1 John 2:1, NI⁸⁰v) 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.⁸¹

⁷⁷NIV New International Version

⁷⁸KJV King James Version

⁷⁹KJV King James Version

⁸⁰NIV New International Version

⁸¹ Norman L. Geisler, “[Colossians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 674.