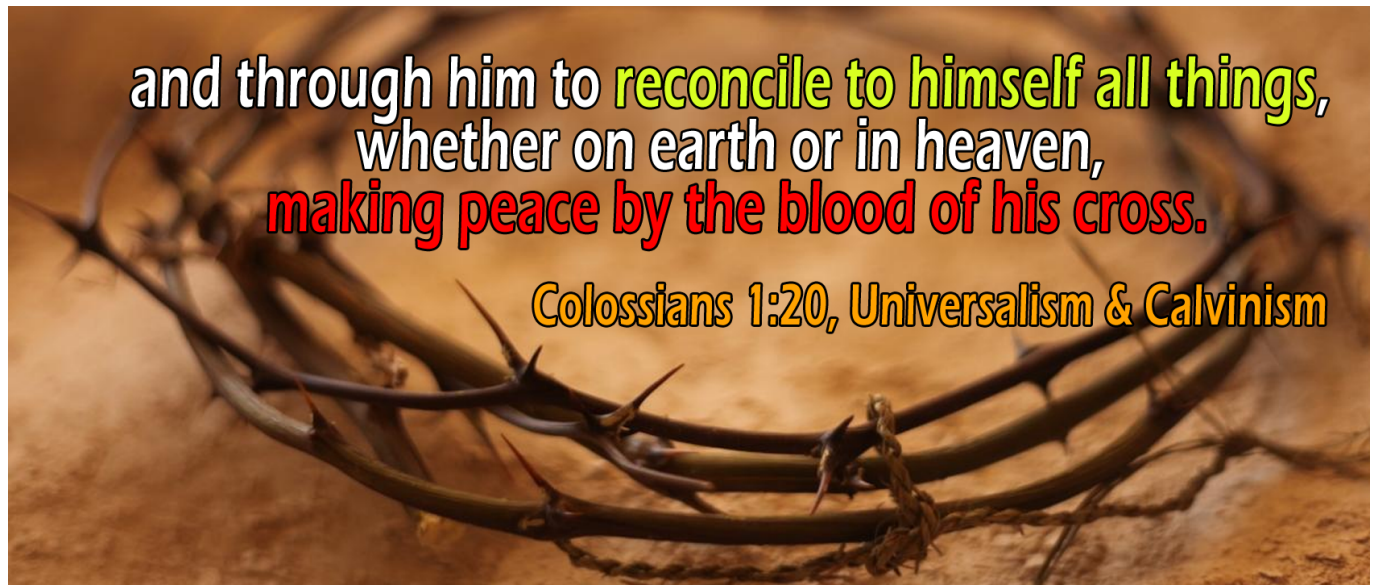


Colossians 1:19-20, 'reconcile to himself all things'

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

This is another one of the verses that Universalists like to use. While this site is not meant to refute Universalism, I've seen this verse used against Limited Atonement, so I thought it should be helpful if we could take a look at it and see what it teaches.

The Sovereignty Of Christ

We should realise that the context is actually about the absolute sovereignty of Christ in both creation and preservation. Meaning, it is primarily not about the atonement, but about His sovereign reign over the created cosmos. Let's take a look at Colossians 1:

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

In this passage we see that Christ is actually the Creator. He is the One who created all that exists. He is the firstborn of creation - that does not mean that He was the first creature, for the text says all things were created by Him. But not only that, but further in verse 18 the word "firstborn" is connected to *preeminence*. And furthermore, it means that He has the rights of the firstborn, i.e. the

heir of all things (e.g. Heb 1:2-4) that He created.

Paul exhausts the language in trying to clearly communicate that the Lord Christ is the Creator of all that exists, even the wicked powers. This he does when he refers to “rulers or authorities” in verse 16. We should take a look at that phrase in Paul to see what he means.

Rulers and Authorities

The closest use of this phrase (εἴτε ἄρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι) is in the next chapter:

Col 2:15 He **disarmed the rulers and authorities** [τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας] and put them to open shame, by **triumphing over them** in him.

Christ is declared to be victorious in His cross over those rulers and authorities, which in the beginning were created by Him and **for** Him. They have their purpose of existence in Him and in His decree and pleasure. All things, including those evil powers which the Lord Christ triumphed over were created for Christ’s purpose, in order to display His glory somehow.

In Col 2:10 it says that Christ is “the head of all rule and authority”, meaning He is the head both over the good and the bad. He reigns as supreme. But notice here that the verse speaks about institutions and not persons, I mean, about rule and authority, and not rulers and authorities.

In 1Cor 15:24, Christ at His glorious Parousia will destroy all evil “every rule and every authority and power.” That those things are evil which Christ will destroy, needs not be argued about.

In Eph 1:21, Christ reigns supreme “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” in heavenly places. His reigns is over and above all rule and authority, whether it be good or bad, Paul is not concerned in Ephesians 1. Notice also in Eph 1:10 the uniting together of all things in Christ, similar to the “reconciliation” in Colossians 1:20.

In Eph 3:10 we read that it pleased God to display His wisdom through the Church, so that His wisdom may be known to “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” The Lord wanted to demonstrate His wisdom in that He works all things after the counsel of His will and has brought salvation to the Gentiles and Christ through His blood has brought Jewish and Gentile together in one Body (Eph 2). God wanted to clearly demonstrate His victory over the wicked powers which had the unbelieving Gentiles, which now are in Christ, under their sway.

In Eph 6:12 I believe we read the clearest example that this phrase often refers to evil authorities. Paul says:

Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the **rulers** [τὰς ἀρχὰς], against the **authorities** [τὰς ἐξουσίας], against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Our struggle against sin, is also our struggle against those powers. These rulers and authorities want to bring us down, but God has provided the way in which we can resist and overcome them.

There is a last use of the phrase under question in Titus 3:10 where Paul says that believers should “be submissive to rulers and authorities”. This does not refer to the rulers and authorities as in Eph

6:12, i.e the evil spiritual rulers and authorities, but it refers to the government, which was not really good in the time of the Romans. They were not pro-Christian, but anti-Christ. But still, Paul calls believers to be submissive and obedient to the government.

By now you may rightly question, why I went through this research of the phrase “rulers and authorities”. The reason I believe is, to demonstrate the clear context of Colossians and the sovereignty of Christ over the whole of the created order. Namely, that both good and evil rule and authority exists for His purpose and are under His reign.

In Him All Things Hold Together

The whole cosmos holds together and stays in exists because it is Christ who reigns. This is what Col 1:17 is teaching when it says that “in him all things hold together”. It is because of Him they were created. It is because of Him they still exist. It is for His purpose they exist.

The reason that order rather than chaos exists, is exactly because Christ reigns supreme over all things. It is He who is sovereign over every minute thing and it is He who is directing all things to their purpose (e.g. Heb 1:3; Eph 1:11).

We should keep this mind while we proceed further, that it is because of Christ that even the evil powers exist. It is to demonstrate His glory. It is He who keeps them in existence. Even they “hold together” in Him.

Reconciling

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to **reconcile to himself all things**, whether on earth or in heaven, **making peace by the blood of his cross**. 21 And **you**, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 **he has now reconciled** in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

That which makes God God, the θεότητος, was pleased to dwell in Christ (Col 2:9) and through His cross He has reconciled all things to Himself. The word ἀποκαταλλάξαι (G604) is unique and is used only by Paul (Eph 2:16; Col 1:20, 22). Thayer’s Greek Definitions says the following:

- Original: ἀποκαταλλάσσω

- Transliteration: Apokatallasso

- Phonetic: ap-ok-at-al-las'-so

- Definition:

1. to reconcile completely
2. to reconcile back again
3. bring back a former state of harmony

- Origin: from G575 and G2644
- TDNT entry: 05:18,4
- Part(s) of speech: Verb^{LI}

Since the word is unique being used only by Paul and it is not even used outside the Bible, then we should proceed with caution when we assign a meaning to it. The meaning should be gleaned from the present context where the word is used.

I believe the sense of reconciliation that is being spoken of Paul here, is twofold. First up is, the salvation of believers and second is the subjection of all things under Him.

Salvation

The first sense is seen when Paul speaks that God reconciled the “you” of the believers in verses 21-22. It is directly and explicitly they, who are reconciled **in** His body by His death. Meaning, that His death was the cause or the means of their reconciliation back to God. It was the means that they have peace with God. Moreover, it is they, i.e. the believer who were reconciled “in his body of flesh by his death” who will be holy and blameless. It does not speak of everything and everyone without exception being reconciled back to a loving and peaceful relationship with God as Universalists would desire the text to mean. Those who will be holy and blameless, were the ones in the past “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds” (Col 1:21), but now have faith (Col 1:23). It is not they who still do evil deeds, but will *eventually* or *directly* enter into God’s loving presence. See also Eph 1:4; 5:25-26 for “holy and blameless” being limited to the elect.

Notice also, in verse 23 where Paul warns the believers to continue steadfast in the faith. This also would be useless, if Paul is actually speaking of the salvation of all the human race, including maybe the angels, then this verse is meaningless. Because whether they believe or not, is irrelevant, according to Universalism, since they *eventually* or *directly* will enter into God’s loving presence.

Subjection

The second sense of reconciliation is that, all things will be brought under His *visible* subjection. Notice the use of *visible*. All things now are under the subjection of Christ, but that is not visible to us. When we look at the world it seems to us, from a sinful perspective, that Christ is actually not reigning supreme. But the Bible actually does say that Christ the Lord possess all rule and authority (e.g. Matt 28:18; Col 2:10).

All things, even the evil powers, are being held together by Him (Col 1:17) and are under His authority and exist for His purpose (Col 1:15). Even in the present. But in the eternal state, He will reign over them in a visible and absolute manner that no one will be able to say anything but that God reigns supreme.

I believe that Hebrews 2 speaks of the Lord Jesus (Heb 2:9) exactly in this sense.

Heb 2:7-8 You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, 8 **putting everything in subjection under his feet.**” Now in putting everything in subjection to him, **he left nothing outside his control.** At present, **we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.**

Notice that the Holy Spirit is saying that nothing is outside of Christ control. Everything is under His holy feet *already*. At the present, we do not see that reality. The Author is not saying that there are some things outside of Christ's control. That he does not say. But what he points out is the fact that we do not *see* that reality as we should. We see them rebel, and in our sinful minds, we think that it means that Christ is not reigning supreme. The issue is in our perception, not in the reality of Christ's sovereign reign.

In the eternal state, it would be made visible and obvious that the Triune God reigns supreme over all things. It will be seen and understood both by the reprobates and the elect.

Conclusion

When we look closely to the context of this passage we see the terrible misuse of this passage by the Universalists. They basically ignore the context of the passage and want to say that the death of Christ atones for the sins of all without exception, although the death of Christ in the passage is directly related to the believers.

Furthermore, we saw that Christ achieved reconciliation in two senses. The first was through His substitutionary death wherein those who were in darkness doing evil things, have come to the light of the Gospel. The second sense was that everything and everyone, both reprobate and elect will be *visibly* and *clearly* to human perception under the subjection and sovereign rule of Christ in the eternal state.

Footnotes

1. [^] This is taken from [The Word](#) module [Thayer's Greek Definitions](#). G604.