

Reconciliation: From God to Sinners

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[0 : 00] Well, it is good to be with you, and this morning we are going to examine a very important doctrine as beyond important because it is essential to our salvation, and you could see how important that would be. Without the application of this doctrine, we are forever unsaved beyond any hope of a legitimate relationship with the Father through the finished work of the Son on the cross.

And I'll be speaking this morning of the word reconcile or reconciliation. These words express an essential doctrine in the Bible. Interestingly, they are words that do not appear frequently in the New Testament. But when they do appear, we need to sit up and take note because in each case they were written or spoken to us by the Apostle Paul, a giant of the faith in the New Testament era. And the Apostle Paul uses these words in five places in the New Testament, twice in the book of Romans, and once each in 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians.

Now, for Paul, the word reconciliation was a theological term that was at the very heart of the heart of the Christian message. The word captured the totality of the gospel. I feel quite certain Paul would be comfortable in using the word gospel or using the word reconcile. They meant the same thing. It describes the saving work of God through the cross of the Lord Jesus. And in fact, Paul described the gospel of Christ or the gospel of God as the ministry of reconciliation.

And Paul gave us the great affirmation that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. And by the way, that is not a statement on universalism. Not everybody has been reconciled. And not everybody is going to be saved because not everyone has been reconciled. The world spoken of there is the world of those who believe or will believe at some point in the future. Paul even described our response in faith to the preaching of the gospel as receiving our reconciliation. So you can tell with the apostle Paul, this was a vitally important doctrine and an essential doctrine to salvation.

[3 : 42] Paul used terms interchangeably, salvation terms. And of all the great words in the Bible, redemption, justification, being born again, all these describe salvation.

None, none in my view was more expressive than the word reconciliation. So that leads to a very important question this morning. What does the word reconciliation mean? The concept of reconciliation is the same both in secular Greek literature and the divinely inspired Greek of the New Testament.

It speaks of two people who are at enmity with each other. Now in the secular world, this might be a husband or wife. This may be two neighbors. In the police department where I work, you'd be surprised at how often we are called upon to referee. I remember a call we got one day because the guy had mowed his lawn. He blowed leaves over on his neighbor's yard and they were about to come to fisticuffs. We deal with these things constantly. But regardless, it describes people who are at enmity with each other. The Bible also speaks of two people, but in the case of Holy Scripture, one person is our holy and perfect God and the other person is a lost sinner. Still two people. But they're not arguing over leaves. They're not a husband and wife that are fighting. Now this raises another important question. What do we mean when we use this word enmity? Well, we can define it this way. Enmity is a feeling or condition of hostility, hatred, ill will, animosity, and antagonism. Pretty serious words to describe this word enmity.

Enmity. Enmity was actually introduced into the human race in the Garden of Eden, Genesis chapter 3, when our original parents chose the path of sin and disobedience. Enmity became the guiding force not only for God's dealings with Satan, who was at enmity with God, but with God's dealing with the human race, because sin was ushered in and remains to this day.

[6 : 36] To reconcile then means to bring persons together who had previously fallen out, to replace alienation and hostility and opposition by a new relationship, relationship, a relationship of

favor, of goodwill, and of peace. This is all part of the new creation.

We become new persons in Christ. It is a transformation, if you will, of attitude that places two people dealing with each other on a whole new footing. Everything becomes new. Old things pass away.

Now, in the human experience, either person may approach the other, or they both may come to their senses at the same time and say, you know, why are we fighting over this? And they may come together at the same time to settle their differences. It is possible that a third person might want to intervene, wanting to bring two people at enmity with each other, bring them together to help them settle their differences.

And police officers are called upon to do this often. And it's sad to say, but the majority of police officers are killed in America standing between an arguing husband and an arguing wife.

It's an amazing statistic. Some 35% of the officers that lose their lives are in a domestic situation. Often, though, we do this successfully, sometimes not.

[8 : 28] But this describes for us the human experience as we interact with each other as members of the human family.

This is not what happens with the reconciliation between God and mankind. This is not what happens.

We must remember that in the relationship between God and fallen humanity, God is always the injured and offended party.

Always. Always. Men and women are never the injured party when it comes to their dealings with God.

This is a central truth and a monumental revelation. And we have to grasp it or we will never understand the doctrine of reconciliation.

[9 : 29] Mark this truth down in your notes or in your mental file. Mark this truth down in your notes.

flows downward from God to a member of Adam's fallen race. Who does it come to? Anyone God chooses.

He's God. And he can give them reconciliation whenever he wants. This very thought is captured by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:20 when he wrote by inspiration.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. And again, Paul is speaking of the world of those who would believe.

God knew who they were. And God knows who they are long before we know who we are. In fact, so certain is God of this knowledge that he wrote our names down in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world.

[10 : 59] Before there was a universe, before there were angels, before there were people. God wrote his people's names in the Lamb's Book of Life. So, what do we know at this point?

Reconciliation is wholly a work of God as the offended party. The breach was caused by man's sin, which was introduced at the Garden of Eden.

Sin was not introduced at the Garden. There had already been sin in heaven, hadn't there? Lucifer and fallen angels. But sin was introduced into the human race in the Garden of Eden.

This breach was caused by Adam's sin, by Eve's sin, by my sin, and your sin.

That is why we never read of men or women seeking to reconcile themselves to God. In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us in the great book of Romans, chapter 3, that there are none who seek after God.

[12 : 14] We recently went through a period in this country, the last 20 years or so, by a false religion called the Seeker Movement. There is one seeker in the Bible. Only one.

And it's the Lord. He is seeking those whom he can save. He is seeking those who will worship him in spirit and in truth. God is the great seeker in the Word of God.

And God alone is the reconciler. There are no other reconcilers in the universe. God alone is the reconciler.

I would never presume to approach God with a bucket overflowing with sins in the hope of somehow inducing him, with my mind probably trying to trick him, into reconciling us.

That thought never crossed my mind when I was lost. Instead, we humbly and we thankfully accept the faith, the reconciliation that God has provided for his children in Christ Jesus.

[13 : 27] We accept reconciliation by faith because it's taught to us by the Lord. Reconciliation presupposes an estrangement or separation on at least one side.

In the case of God and sinners, the estrangement was mutual. God tells us in Colossians 121 that prior to reconciliation to himself, we are estranged and hostile in our minds doing evil deeds. And the Bible makes it very clear that the natural state of every child of Adam, that's lost people, he says in Romans 8-7, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

That's the natural state of humanity. Now the word of God makes it clear that fallen, sinful man is opposed to God and everything that God stands for.

It is the natural state of man to disobey God's law, to disbelieve the gospel of Christ, to reject any idea that God will judge humanity for rejecting him.

[14 : 51] I always remember when Moses went up on the mountain to get the Ten Commandments and what were they doing down in the valley? Making golden calves and sinning.

They were sinning. If sinners could somehow dethrone God, repeal his laws, they would.

And I'll tell you, you see this. You see this in the great United States of America. You look at the federal court rulings in the last 30 to 50 years. That's nothing but an effort to dethrone God.

That's exactly what that is. I loved John MacArthur when the Supreme Court ushered in legalized same-sex marriage and John MacArthur preached a great sermon.

You can find it on YouTube called We Will Not Bow. We Will Not Bow. I listen to it often. Men and women are born rebels against God.

[15 : 54] Mankind in his fallenness is at enmity with God. And this is why the Bible in both the Old and New Testament repeatedly describes the human condition as being dead in trespasses and sins.

That's repeated in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Dead in trespasses and in sins. Have you ever thought, what does that mean to be dead?

What does that mean? It means the inability to do anything. You can't do anything. You can't breathe. You can't talk. You can't sit up.

And that's the condition of lost mankind. They're dead in trespasses and sins. And only God can impart spiritual life.

And he does. He does to the church in our day. Now, none of what I've said should be a great shock to any of us. But now I'm going to tell you something that might shock some, but it shouldn't if you're a real student of the Bible.

[17 : 05] Now, God is equally at enmity with sinners. God is also at enmity with sinners.

Now, that is not the message that the world wants to hear. That's not what they want to hear at all. And it is denied almost universally. The liberal church certainly denies it with vengeance.

But the Bible is very clear on the matter. Paul in Romans 5.10 says this, We were reconciled to God through the death of Christ, now get this down, while we were enemies.

That is an amazing statement. The Holy Spirit wrote those words. We, that's believers, the church, have been reconciled to God through the death of Christ.

That's the cross. That's the atonement. While we were enemies. God didn't wait for us to clean ourselves up, did he? Why not?

[18 : 12] God, as we say in Oklahoma, and we're in Oklahoma, ain't going to happen. We're not going to clean ourselves up. It takes God to clean us up.

While we were enemies, God looked down with favor on his people and reconciled them. That word enemy describes men's moral character, but it is also used to describe the relationship in which men stand as objects of God's displeasure until they are saved.

The great theologian, Charles Hodge, who lived in the 18th and 19th centuries, said this, There is not only a wicked opposition of the sinner to God, but a holy opposition of God to the sinner.

Now that is a vitally important concept. And please don't leave here without understanding. Any opposition that God has toward a fallen sinner is based upon all of his divine attributes, especially his holiness.

His holiness. James Orr was a great Scottish theologian of some 150 years ago. He divined the idea of biblical wrath like this.

[19 : 34] Divine wrath is an energy of the divine nature called forth by the presence of daring or presumptuous transgression and expressing the reaction of the divine holiness against it in the punishment and destruction of the transgressor.

It is the zeal of God for the maintenance of his holiness and honor and of the ends of his righteousness and love when these are threatened by the ingratitude, rebellion, and willful

disobedience of the creature.

Very important. We're talking about Adam's race, people that are in rebellion to the living God. A more contemporary theologian in our day, Dr. Packer, who's now 90 years old, put it this way, God's wrath against sin is not a fitful flicker, but a steady blaze.

not a mark of uncertain temper, but an aspect of the consistent righteousness of the just judge of all the earth.

To this hostile reaction of God, Paul tells us all sinners as such are exposed. The first truth expounded in the book of Romans, chapter 1, verse 18, is this, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men.

[21 : 08] God hasn't canceled that verse, by the way. That verse is more appropriate in our day than it was when Paul wrote it. Back to Dr. Packer. Men are opposed to God in their sin, and God is opposed to men in his holiness.

Those who are under the rule of sin are also under the wrath of God. It is against the dark background of this view of the natural relation between man and his maker that the gospel introduces us to the great doctrine of reconciliation.

So there is hope and great hope because reconciliation comes from God. It flows down to us.

Reconciliation means peacemaking. Peacemaking. Peacemaking. The children of God can be at peace because Christ made peace for us by the blood of the cross.

Beloved, the cross is the peace treaty signed in blood by the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the great peace treaty.

[22 : 23] We have been reconciled to God by the death of his son. I want to make three points, and then we will hurry on to our conclusion.

First, reconciliation was made by the blood of Christ, and that speaks of sacrifice, doesn't it? That speaks of sacrifice. This was first taught in the Old Testament era by the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of animals.

They all pointed to Christ and to the cross. The Bible is crystal clear that without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sin, and therefore guilt remains.

And the world rejects that and hates that truth. And if you don't think it hates it, what happened to Abel when he sacrificed a lamb and Cain found out?

Cain murdered his brother, didn't he? When Adam and Eve sinned, what did God do? He killed an innocent animal and created coverings for them because they found out they were naked and they were embarrassed and didn't want to go before God in that state.

[23 : 37] So God, even that far back, was giving us examples of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.

I've had people take issue with that. You know what I tell them? I'm labor. Take it up with management. You need to talk to God about that because he's the one that said it. The second point is this.

Reconciliation is provided the children of God through bloodshedding by which peace was made between God and man. When we were reconciled, and I hope everybody in here has been.

If you haven't, let's visit. I'll even buy you lunch. Reconciliation is provided the children of God through bloodshedding by which peace was made between God and man.

When we were reconciled, the enmity between us and God was destroyed. It no longer exists. And divine wrath, though justly deserved, was turned away for how long?

[24 : 50] Eternity. Forever and ever. This speaks to a word we don't use much anymore, and we should, to the word propitiation.

You can read about that in John's first epistle. Propitiation is the turning away of God's wrath. And that fits hand in glove with the reconciliation of the cross.

Propitiation is the word for appeasement or satisfaction. God saw the blood of his dear son, and he was satisfied that everything had been done to turn away his wrath from the sinner who would believe.

And the third point is this. On the cross, he, and that is Christ Jesus, he who knew no sin.

Now, how much sin did Jesus have on the cross? Zero. He who knew no sin was made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[26 : 06] And again, that him is Christ. Let me say it again. He who knew no sin was made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Christ did not become a sinner on the cross. He is sinless. He took the sin of his people upon himself.

Now, what does all that mean? On the cross, all and every single one of our sins was imputed to Christ.

He took them. And on the cross, the pure, perfect righteousness of Christ was imputed to us. And you may be like me saying, well, I don't feel very righteous.

We're talking about position. In God's eyes, if you're one with Jesus, you have his righteousness in you. When the Father looked at his Son on the cross, he saw the accumulated sins of everyone who would ever believe.

[27 : 20] In fact, I think we can say God turned his eyes, closed his eyes. The whole world became dark. When the Father looks at us, he sees the righteousness of Christ in us, if indeed you are one with Jesus.

If you're going to stand before a holy God as his child, you will do so only by bearing the righteousness of his dear Son.

God needs to see the blood of Jesus in you. Reconciliation was made by Christ's death, but it is not possessed until it is received.

How is it received? like everything else with God by faith. By faith. We do not work for it. We cannot earn it. We will never deserve it.

But by faith in a living Savior, we can possess reconciliation. And those who do not possess it are still lost.

[28 : 27] They are still lost. Now, what kind of faith appropriates reconciliation? reconciliation. This was summed up beautifully by James Denny in his book *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*.

If a man or a woman with a sense of his sin on him sees what Christ on the cross means, there is only one thing for him to do. If you look to the cross and understand it, there is only one thing to do. He must abandon himself to the sin bearing love which appeals to him in Christ and to do so unreservedly, unconditionally, and forever.

That is what the New Testament means by faith. And let me again go to Dr. Packer. Faith both takes and gives.

God's promises, God's son, and God's salvation, and it gives itself up to God's service.

[29 : 34] It takes the Lord, a Savior, and gives itself to the Savior as Lord. So the reconciliation is received and guilty sinners find peace with God.

Are you at peace with God this morning? Then I would imagine you've been reconciled. This then is the conclusion of the matter. Reconciliation means an ending of enmity and the making of peace and friendship with each other by reason of men's sins, but God has acted in Christ to reconcile sinners to himself through the cross.

The achieving of reconciliation was a task which Christ completed at Calvary. In virtue of God's finished work of atonement, God now invites sinners everywhere to receive the reconciliation and thus be reconciled to him.

Believers enjoy through Christ an actual reconciliation that is with God and it is perfect and it is final. Perfect and final. Nothing can be added to it because nothing is lacking and it is perfect and since it is perfect it is everlasting.

[31 : 01] The new life that it brings in which you know God as your father, Jesus as the great reconciler as your friend and yourself as fully and freely forgiven is both joyous and endless.

Reconciliation is the very heart of the gospel and must forever be the crowning theme of Christian praise. And you know what?

We don't have to wait for heaven to praise God for our reconciliation. We can do that in this life and we should.

Thank you.