

Reconciliation

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- [0 : 0 0] So, in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 16 onwards, we'll read as Paul writes, So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.
- Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.
- All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.
- And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.
- We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- [1 : 1 5] The cross of Christ, or perhaps if we put it more aptly, Christ and him crucified, is at the centre of the Christian message and the church's witness to the world.
- As Paul says of himself and all the apostles, we preach Christ crucified. When he arrived in Corinth, the city was used to visiting orators, showing off their public speaking skills on a whole manner of subjects.
- The object was really just to dazzle people with your speaking skills. But Paul was very different. He determined to know nothing among them other than Jesus Christ and him crucified.
- It's a scandalous or a silly message to the unbelieving, but to those who God has called. It is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- Holy Scripture testifies to the necessity of the sufferings of the Son of God. Jesus said on the Emmaus Road, did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?
- [2 : 3 9] Peter says the prophets of old searched intently with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.
- That's 1 Peter 1, verses 10 and 11. As both these scriptures remind us, though, the sufferings of Christ were not the last word. Glory was to follow.
- The sufferings were clearly necessary, however, and something the whole of scripture's story was anticipating and building up to.
- Even when we see God telling the serpent in the garden that the seed of the woman would crush his head and the serpent would strike his heel immediately after the fall.
- He wasn't revealing a plan B, but rather something ordained from eternity. And then throughout the Old Testament scriptures, we see in the Passover, the covenant curses.
- [3 : 5 8] For example, in Deuteronomy 28, the sacrificial system in the tabernacle and the temple and Isaiah's prophecies of the suffering servant, they were all pointing to what was to come.

When the word became flesh and dwelt among us, it was with the purpose of that flesh being nailed to a Roman cross. In the supreme example of God's working men's evil, for good and the saving of many lives, the Messiah was handed over and slain by wicked men according to God's own plan and foreknowledge.

Acts chapter 2 and verse 23. The purpose of the cross was salvation for otherwise lost and helpless sinners. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed, says Peter in his first letter. As Peter makes clear here, more than forgiveness for sins is in view.

Death to sin and a new life of righteousness is what Christ's sin-bearing death secured for all those who believe.

[5 : 22] Imperfect as the believer's righteousness may be in this life, Christ's death did and does liberate those who were once under the power of sin for good works that God has prepared in advance for them to walk in.

Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10. Last week we looked at the substitutionary aspect of the cross. It's an essential aspect of the cross. Christ acted as a substitute, the one on behalf of the many.

He deserved no punishment. He had no sin. No deceit was found in his mouth. However, we, on the contrary, have plenty of deceit found in our mouths.

We have plenty of sin on our accounts and we can't do anything to expunge that record. But Christ can stand in our place and pay the penalty that's due to us for our sins.

So that's substitution. And this week we turn our attention towards another feature of the cross, reconciliation. God created human beings in his own image and they lived in perfect fellowship with him.

[6 : 37] But that fellowship was broken by our fall into sin. And that breakdown in relationship is seen very clearly in the expulsion of our first parents from the Garden of Eden and the curse that fell on them and on the earth as a result of their sin.

So reconciliation is the restoration of fellowship. And this is something which the cross achieves. We know the language of reconciliation from our own lives, don't we?

We know what it is to be reconciled to someone and the opposite term, to be estranged from someone, to be not speaking to them, to not be in relationship with them.

We may have felt that very painfully too. But we know the blessing of reconciliation and we know what it means. It's the restoration to right relationship where there has been a problem or a rupture in that relationship before.

And the rupture between God and human beings is huge. The need for reconciliation is vital. And what I just want to touch on tonight is three aspects to this reconciliation that the cross achieves.

[8 : 02] Firstly, and foremostly, it's reconciliation between God and man. There's hostility between God and man.

On God's part, there's hostility towards sinful man. You might hear the expression, God loves the sinner but hates the sin. That's totally unscriptural because God hates sinners as well as the sin.

And the scriptures speak about this all over the place. Psalm 5 and verse 5, you hate all evildoers. Not you hate all evil, you hate all evildoers.

You destroy those who speak lies. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. And as Romans tells us in chapter 1 at the start of Paul's great indictment against the human race in verse 18, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

That doesn't mean God doesn't love sinners as well. He's able to love sinners and hate them for their sin at the same time and purpose to what we're looking at tonight.

[9 : 21] Reconcile them to ourselves. But it's unscriptural to say God loves the sinner but hates the sin. But of course it's not just that God is hostile towards sinners who've turned their back on him, suppressed the truth about him, gone after every other kind of idol other than him and indulged themselves in all manner of sinful thoughts, ideas and practices that are totally contrary to his law.

We, by nature now, as sinful people, are hostile to God before we come to Christ, before we become a child of God.

Again, in Romans, as Paul goes on in his explanation of the state of fallen mankind, in chapter 1 and verse 32 and 33, he's describing people apart from God.

They are gossip, slanderers, haters of God. Romans 8, chapter 7. The mind governed by the flesh, that is the sinful nature, is hostile to God.

Yet man is at enmity with God. He shakes his fist at God. He doesn't want to obey God. It does not submit to God's law, says Paul, nor can it do so.

[10 : 34] So that shows us the extent of the hostility. It's on both sides between God and man. So we might say this is the vertical reconciliation that needs to take place between God in heaven and us on earth.

Reconciliation needs to happen. But as we've just read there in Romans, chapter 8 and verse 7, if our mind is hostile to God by nature, if we're unconverted, we can't take the step towards reconciliation, can we?

We're not interested in doing so. The natural man is not interested in reconciling himself to God. He wants to be his own God and follow his own way. So it's therefore God who must, and thanks be to God, does take the initiative in reconciling us to himself.

We can't do anything about it, but not only can't we do anything about it, we don't by nature want to. And it's in the son of God becoming a human being, becoming a man, that we see God's determination to bring God and humans back together again.

So clearly, as the Christmas carol puts it, hark the herald angels sing, peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.

[12 : 01] As a divine nature and a human nature, they concur in one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. We see so strikingly, God and man brought together.

However, this reconciliation between God and sinners, although we can say it was begun, initiated at the birth of Christ, as hark the herald angel sings, puts it, it is in fact not actually accomplished until the death of Christ on the cross.

Jesus, by virtue of being born, doesn't immediately reconcile God and sinners. It's by virtue of his death that God and sinners are reconciled.

How can that happen? What's the thing separating them? For God and sinners to be reconciled, the thing that separates them has to be removed, it has to be dealt with, and in the case of this ruptured relationship, it's sin.

So how is it then that what happened at the cross brings reconciliation between God and humans? It's because there at Calvary, the sin that separates us and that is the source of this hostility, hostility on our part and on God's part towards us is dealt with.

[13 : 25] Now, this leads us to an unusual but a very important word. this is right at the heart of what the cross is all about and the word is propitiation.

You don't hear that every day but we see it several times in scripture at least in some English translations of the scripture. It became a highly contentious word particularly in the 20th century as many more liberal theologians objected to the word being used because of what it means which I'll get to in a moment because propitiation is the turning away of God's wrath.

It's averting God's anger that should come to us. You know, if nothing were done that would be coming our way on judgment day, wouldn't it?

We would be standing with all our sin and there would be no other judgment than guilty and a wave of wrath to consume us. And so what happens at the cross is the turning away of wrath that is heading our way and it being directed on to Christ.

And we see it in the scriptures. I'm reading from the ESV here because they maintain the translation of the word propitiation. So in Romans 3, 23 to 25, a passage we looked at a couple of weeks ago, Paul says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

[15 : 15] Without the shedding of blood, there's no forgiveness for sins. The shedding of blood shows God's anger and God's penalty at sin, which is death. Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 17, therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

And finally, 1 John chapter 4 and verses 10 and 11, in this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. So we see here the centrality. If we're to be reconciled, God's wrath against sin has to be dealt with.

It's not just the sin itself, but God is angry at our sin, rightly so, because he's perfectly holy and just and he will inflict punishment on it.

It's in Christ the substitute taking it upon himself that God is, God's wrath is, what we would say, propitiated. It doesn't make God love us though, does it?

[16 : 34] Because as 1 John tells us, this is love. That God dealt with it himself rather than inflicting his wrath on us.

That God, as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit dealt with this sin problem himself. The Son took upon himself in a human nature and a human body the punishment for our sins and so the wrath is now dealt with.

It's completely gone. It's Christ's propitiating, peacemaking blood that spares us from God's wrath and that then, with that removed, that was the thing that was causing the problem.

With that now removed, dealt with, it is finished, said Christ, the two parties can come back together again. There's reconciliation between God and sinners and that's then what the scriptures speak of so much and in particular as we've seen, it's the Apostle Paul that really talks a lot about this amazing blessing that flows from the cross.

In Romans chapter 5 and verses 9 to 11, Paul says, Since therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

[18 : 01] So it's saying, if that is how God's wrath was dealt with while we were yet sinners, how much more confident will we be that now we are reconciled? Wrath is not a thing we have to worry about anymore.

He goes on to say, For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. That is, peace with God, a restored relationship to God is such an amazing blessing.

Can you think of how horrible it really is to be out of joint with the creator of the universe and to have him be under his judgment effectively and not be in right relationship with him?

Well, when we see how awful that is, then we see how glorious it is to be put back in right relationship to him, to be reconciled fully to him through the blood that Christ shed.

[19 : 07] Not something we've done for ourselves, something Christ did for us, or indeed something God did for us in Christ, and we are brought back into that fellowship with God.

It's really amazing. So that's the vertical, and that's often the only thing that's preached. God and sinners reconciled, and it is the foremost aspect of the reconciliation, but there is very much a horizontal reconciliation between humans that occurs through the cross of Christ as well.

foremostly in this regard, it's the ancient hostility between Jew and Gentile. That is ended by the cross, but why, again, is it the cross that does this?

It's ended when both come together into the body of Christ. There's only one body of Christ, isn't there? There's not two bodies of Christ or three bodies of Christ. Is Christ divided?

It says Paul to the Corinthians. No, there's one body of Christ. He's the head of one body. And so when Jew and Gentile believe, they become part of one new body.

[20 : 20] His blood is shed for all who believe. And the classic kind of passage that addresses that aspect of reconciliation is Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 11 to verse 22.

It's quite a long passage, but it just shows you the richness of what has now been made available to the Gentiles. It's something we can become a little bit forgetful about.

We forget just how Jewish the scriptures are, just how Jewish the Old Testament is, how Jewish the promises were, and how that was really bound up as far as the Jews were concerned with them and not really many other people.

Maybe the odd outsider like Ruth coming in to show that God was really gracious, but what they couldn't get their heads around and what Paul was continually trying to show them was that no, the Gentiles are being brought into the people of God under one covenant of grace.

And so therefore he says in the passage in Ephesians, therefore, and he's addressing Gentile Christians at this point, therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands.

[21 : 38] Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

That's drastic, isn't it? It sounds awful. But now, there's so many but nows in the New Testament, they always say something magnificent and wonderful about what God's done to save us from that situation.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near again by the blood of Christ, the blood of Christ for he himself is our peace, reconciliation, who has made us both one, he's made us both one, Jew and Gentile are one, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

That is the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. As some of you have visited Israel know, there was a wall in the temple beyond which Gentiles could not go. By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, the Sabbath, the circumcision, the food laws, that he might create in himself one new man in the place of the two, so making peace and might, reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

That's the reconciliation that exists between the two groups really that the scriptures identify as being different, the Jews and the Gentiles now being made into one man, as it were, one humanity, one new humanity through the cross, through the blood of Christ.

[23 : 22] And that shows us then the importance of, as Paul said, is Christ divided? No, he's not divided. So we remember this reconciliation that has brought every blood-bought sinner into the one body of Christ.

There we go, that's the message of reconciliation on the horizontal level and it shows us as well, we see it throughout the life of the church, the idea is you drink from one cup to show the commonality of communion, that we're all together.

So often people look at the Lord's Supper as this is me and the Lord now having our time together, which is not that at all, it's not supposed to express that in the slightest.

It's we are all one in the Lord, that's one loaf of bread that's torn apart to show that we're one body. And so that's the reconciliation that occurs on the horizontal level and it's very important and we remind ourselves of that in all our relationships.

We seek reconciliation and of course Christ emphasised seeking reconciliation before, in the case he was describing of going to the temple to make your offering, but we would certainly understand that to be the same before going to the Lord's table.

[24 : 39] To be reconciled, if there's anything anyone has against anyone else in the body, reconcile, first of all, before coming together, because we're all one in Christ Jesus.

So there's the vertical, we're reconciled to God, that's amazing. Humanity in the church is reconciled one to the other and that's amazing too and these old divisions between Jew and Gentile are removed and also whatever backgrounds we've come from that are different, we are now all, we now all share in being united to Christ and so we're reconciled in that amazing way too.

But there's another dimension spoken of even less, the cosmic dimension. That is the universe being reconciled to God. Colossians chapter 1 verses 18 to 22 where Paul is just in orbit here talking about Christ in terms of just how glorious he is, his divine nature is shining forth in this passage.

Paul says, and he, Jesus, is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by, once again, the blood of his cross.

It's the blood that makes the peace, it's the blood that makes reconciliation possible and you who were once alienated and hostile in mind, again, the natural hostility of the human doing evil deeds, 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.

[26 : 41] What Jesus' death on the cross will ultimately accomplish when it's finally fulfilled is every knee will bow, Philippians 2.10 and there's this picture of a return of harmony to the creation because it's been affected by the fall.

Cursed is the ground because of you, says God, because of Adam's sin. We see and read in, for example, Romans, again, chapter 8, the creation's groaning under the effects of sin and so, when we see that Christ is making peace by the blood of his cross, we see that the final state of the whole universe is something secured by the reconciling work of Christ on the cross.

That is, there will be what Jesus describes as the regeneration, the making of all things new, a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells will be the result of Christ's reconciling work on the cross.

So we can often think of salvation very individualistically in the West. It's me and Jesus so often and often we're reading the Bible to see what's in it for me.

You know, I want a word of application straight out of this right now to encourage me today practically in some way. Whereas the Bible's primarily about God, not ourselves and it's to show us who he is and it's a huge picture of salvation that's being portrayed in Holy Scripture.

[28 : 22] So for us to reduce it down to few, I'm okay, is understandable maybe but it's to do down what God is actually accomplishing through the cross of Christ and what he will finally accomplish through the cross of Christ.

What then does that mean for the church? Well, as we were reading there right at the start, the church now has the ministry of reconciliation.

That's the gospel. The gospel is the ministry of reconciliation. reconciliation. All this is from God, says Paul, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world. That is, the word cosmos, the universe, to himself. That doesn't mean, by the way, universalism.

Everyone will be saved. But it's more, the people who are not saved are going to be the exception from what is restored. As opposed to one particular view of the end, which is, God's just desperately trying to rescue sinners off this doomed earth before it all goes up in flames and there's nothing he can do about it.

[29 : 37] God is in control and he is going to regenerate his entire cosmos. And it's only the unbelievers that will be missing out rather than this other view that has such a minimal view of the salvation of a few souls and everything else goes up in flames.

There will be a great purification. There will be a great change. It will be fundamental. It will be beyond our imagining. But, again, as I've said, this is not a kind of failed experiment by God, a sinking ship.

He's trying to remedy by rescuing a few sinners from... His own son sacrificed himself and shed his blood for this. It's not minor. So we have the ministry of reconciliation.

reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. Just let that sink in. God making his appeal through us.

Anyone who shares the gospel, God is making his appeal to that person through you. We implore you on behalf of Christ. We implore you. We beg you.

[30 : 45] Because we have experienced the ministry of reconciliation for ourselves and we implore others be reconciled to God.

And, again, how can this be? How is the reconciliation happen? For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

That's the practical implication of reconciliation for us in the church. We hold out the message of reconciliation to others and we model it ourselves.

We are not grudge holders. We do not slander one another or speak ill of one another. We do not attack one another's reputations or cause division or be divisive or critical or controversial people for the sake of it because that is to undermine the ministry of reconciliation.

Do you see what I mean? when grace is flowing and we've experienced the ministry of reconciliation how can we withhold reconciliation from others? It's to the extent that when Jesus has asked us should we forgive other people as well Lord?

[32 : 00] He says not only do you have to forgive other people 70 times 7 which is to say infinitely. He's saying your father won't forgive you if you don't forgive.

is that assured that a genuine Christian will be a forgiving person that Christ can say if you don't forgive people neither will your father in heaven because that's just a mark that you're actually not one of my followers.

So we take the ministry of reconciliation very seriously we don't just preach it from the pulpits and badger non-believers to say you need to be reconciled to God now we need to be evidencing the ministry of reconciliation in our lives in our relationships and showing that we are forgiving gracious people who can restore relationship with one another because Jesus says this is how actually people will know that you're my followers you'll love one another and so we must absolutely with all our efforts and by the grace of God repent of an unwillingness to reconcile and seek to reconcile where we can sometimes it's dangerous sometimes it's not wise and particularly for example abusive relationships that is a very unwise thing to do in many occasions and the best thing to do is to stay away but where it can be where reconciliation can take place that's something we should be seeking to do because we are the reconciled with