



RECONCILED TO GOD

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Hello and welcome to Let the Bible Speak. I'm happy you've joined me today for the program. The bible tells us that God sent Jesus Christ into the world to reconcile the world to Himself. That, of course, implies that there was some sort of separation or a conflict between God and man. It took Jesus to repair that breach and restore man to a state of peace with God. When Christ did the things necessary for that to be possible, He then sent messengers out to offer that peace and to make known the conditions of peace. It's much like what takes place when nations find themselves at war today.

Paul explains this to us in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. In verses 18-20 he says: ***"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."***

Paul uses a couple of interesting phrases to describe the work of himself and the other apostles of Christ. He talks about "the ministry of reconciliation" and then he speaks of them being "ambassadors for Christ." It's important that we understand what he meant by both expressions. First, the word "ministry" simply refers to service. It means a servant executing the commands of another or it can have reference to collecting and distributing relief to the poor or the hungry. It can also refer to other acts of service to which one is appointed. In this case, Paul refers to the service rendered by the apostles in making known the King's message of how men can be reconciled to the kingdom of God. That's in essence, the gospel message. Paul says that God has worked to reconcile the world to Himself through Christ, and that He had committed the task of carrying that message of peace to His enemies. He promises to defeat the kingdoms of men and establish peace with those who will surrender to His kingdom. That, of course, introduces the role of an ambassador. We sometimes hear well-meaning people say that all Christians are to be "Christ's ambassadors" and represent Him in the things we say and how we live. But that isn't how Paul was using the term in the passage we're considering today. He

had something and someone more specific in mind when he uses this term. Today, I want us to see what Paul was talking about and how it relates to how we are saved and reconciled to God today.

First, let's consider what Paul meant by the term "reconciliation." In verses 18 and 19, he writes: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." First, Paul shows that the apostles themselves had been reconciled to God and second, that they were commissioned to offer that same reconciliation to others. He says that reconciliation is done through Christ. Paul is talking about reconciling people to God who were His enemies and therefore estranged from Him. To say that we need to be reconciled with God implies that we were at one time separated from Him and at war with Him. This is a picture of where every sinner stands in relation to God. When you think of God's enemies, you might think of someone who claims to not believe in God or who despises the very mention of God. You might think of someone who knowingly works to try and thwart the purposes and the will of God. But perhaps you don't think of yourself as the Lord's enemy. That's how the word of God pictures every one of us as long as we are living in sin and the scriptures remind us that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Now, it's true that God is love and that He loves those who have sinned. But it's equally true that God hates sin and is angry with those who commit sin. In Psalms 7:11, David declared that "God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day." The wicked is any person who sins without repentance. It is the person who rebels against the law of God. That person makes him or herself God's enemy. In fact, in many of the beloved passages that declare the LOVE of God, at the same time, they make clear the wrath of God against sin. For example, one of the most beloved texts in the word of God, John 3:16 says, "For God so **LOVED** the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **SHOULD NOT PERISH** but have everlasting life." Here, Jesus made it plain to Nicodemus that he and the rest of the world were in a perishing state. Why? Because God is holy and just and God's righteous indignation is always kindled against sin. In 2 Peter 3:9, the bible says, "The Lord is...longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Well, that implies that people are destined to perish without God's intervention. That's because all sin is a violation of God's sovereignty, His holiness, and His divine nature. Not some sin but all sin. In Habakkuk 1:13, the prophet says to God: "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness..." Whatever else the bible says of God, this truth is made clear from the Garden of Eden to the summit of Mount Calvary.

Therefore, God's disposition toward sin and those who commit it is one of righteous anger. Sin makes a sinner God's enemy. Ephesians 2:3, Paul refers to those who live according to the flesh, as "children of wrath." But because of His equally loving and merciful nature, God desires peace with the sinner. Paul shows us here in our text and in several other passages that He affected that peace through the sacrifice of His Son, Christ Jesus, upon the cross. 2 Corinthians 5:18, "who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ". In Romans 5:8-10, he says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

The death of Jesus Christ was a sacrificial and vicarious death. God offered His own Son as an atonement for the sins of man. In fact, the word Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5 that is translated "reconciliation" is also translated in other passages by some translators as "atonement" or at-one-ment. The idea is that

people who were at enmity with each other are made one again. That's the idea of reconciliation. Sin separates man from God and for man to be reconciled to God, sin must be removed. God must be able to look at us and see a spotless record to have any relationship with us or else He is not holy and just. Well, the problem is none of us have a spotless record. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But because God offered Jesus as a perfect and unblemished sacrifice (or as an offering for sin as Paul makes plain in 2 Corinthians 5:21) our sins can be forgiven and erased from our record. Paul therefore says in verse 19 that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them..." or as another translation words it "not counting their trespasses against them." And then listen to Paul in Colossians 1:20-23. Speaking of Christ, he says, "and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."

So, Jesus' death is the only means by which our sins can be dealt with and the sinner himself not only escape God's wrath but be reconciled to a right relationship with God. Friend, there is no peace with God outside of Jesus Christ. You cannot do enough good deeds; you cannot have good enough intentions; you cannot perform enough good works to make peace with a holy and righteous God. You have no peace with Him without appropriating the sacrifice of Christ to your soul. And that's why refusing and rejecting Christ means facing God's eternal wrath! And that's why the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is good news by which we are saved and wherein we stand, according to 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

Now then, Paul says that not only did Christ thus reconcile he and the apostles to God, but that they had been given the ministry of offering that same reconciliation to the rest of the world. It is then that he says in verse 20: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." The term "ambassadors" is not a description of Christians in general. It may be true that in a sense we are representing Christ before an unbelieving world when we preach the truth and Christ is seen through our lives but that's not what Paul means here. An ambassador is a more official role than that. For example, in Luke 14:31-32 Jesus asked: "Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation (some translations say an ambassage or an embassy) and asks conditions of peace." The idea is that an ambassador is an official that is dispatched by the King himself to affect an agreement with an outside party. Well, part of God's plan for reconciling sinners to Himself was to send a message of offered peace to His enemies describing what He had done to offer peace and the terms upon which that peace could come about. He appointed an ambassage of special messengers to take that message to the ends of the earth. Those messengers were the apostles Christ chose and sent out to make known the gospel plan of salvation and to offer the terms of pardon to those sinners willing to surrender to Jesus, the King.

Now, when a king sent an ambassador, that ambassador was given a message to carry, and he spoke on behalf of the king himself. Hearing the words of an ambassador was like hearing from the king himself. In fact, notice what he says here: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." He says God was pleading through them and they were imploring others on Christ's behalf. Also notice the different personal

pronouns Paul uses. He uses the pronouns “we” and “us” to refer to Christ’s ambassadors, but then he says “you” in reference to those he is writing to. The members of the Corinthian church were not the ambassadors. They were the ones who the ambassadors had been sent to and who had been reconciled to God through their message. Likewise, neither you nor I are the ambassadors of Christ that Paul is talking about. We are the ones TO whom Christ’s ambassadors were sent to offer the message and terms of reconciliation. That occurred when we heard the gospel which was first preached and published by the apostles Christ chose and sent out into the world. The apostles were and are the representatives of King Jesus in this world today. The word which they first preached and wrote down which we now have in the New Testament scriptures are the message of peace God has extended to all of mankind. And to reject the ambassadors of the King is to reject the King Himself. To reject the New Testament is to reject the Christ revealed in the New Testament. To refuse the commandments of the apostles is to refuse to obey the commandments of Jesus Himself. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:3 that Christ was speaking in or through him and in 1 Corinthians 14:37 he stated that anyone who was indeed spiritual would acknowledge that things he as an apostle of Christ wrote are the very commandments of the Lord himself.

Now then, the apostles were sent forth to declare God’s intention of peace with sinners through the sacrifice of Christ. That’s the gospel. But that offer of peace has conditions and the ambassadors of Christ were sent to make those conditions known. And by receiving and obeying those conditions, peace with God can be found. Some say that salvation is UNCONDITIONAL but they then contradict their own claim when they say faith is necessary to be saved. Obviously, peace with God and reconciliation with God IS conditional because Hebrews 11:6 says that “without faith it is impossible to please God” and Romans 5:1-2 “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” So, clearly, the apostles did more than offer peace to sinners, they offered on certain conditions and those are conditions of faith. It is by the preaching of that message and obedience to that message that we as God’s enemies can be reconciled and have peace with Him. Also, Romans 1:5 says, “Through Him we (Paul and the other apostles) have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.” So, what is this obedience to the faith? Well, friend, let’s look at where their mission as Christ’s ambassadors began. Jesus sent these men out to publish the glad tidings in Mark 16:15-16 saying “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Friend, Jesus tells them the conditions of peace. The message is Christ crucified and risen again and the sinner’s response is to what? Believe and be baptized! Is that what they preached? Well, turn over to Acts 2 when Peter, just a few weeks later, opened the gate of Christ’s kingdom with the keys of the gospel on the day of Pentecost. He declared that the One they crucified was the Christ of God and when they realized that and were made sorry for the terrible thing which they had done they cried out in verse 37 to these ambassadors the now enthroned Christ had sent to them: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Acts 2:38 “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Verse 41 tells us that they did as Peter commanded and they then entered the kingdom of Christ. They received Christ’s offer of peace and they, who were once His enemies, were reconciled to God through Christ and became the friends of God.

Friend, that can happen with you today. If you have not been baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you have not made peace with God. His ambassadors have made clear how that peace is obtained. It is obtained through faith – (not just some mental assent) but faith which responds to Christ’s command to repent or turn away from our sin (Acts 2:38); to confess Him as the Christ of God

(Romans 10:10) and to be baptized into Christ so our sins can be washed away (Acts 22:16). Have you taken those steps? If not, I echo the word of Paul, Christ's ambassador sent to you and to me "Be reconciled to God."

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