

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Things which accompany salvation: Reconciliation

When I was a teenager, I once was double-booked to preach at a Gospel Hall in the west end of Newcastle. Upon my arrival, I was asked to sit at the back of the Hall as my place had been taken at the front by an elderly Christian from Carlisle. I was told that he was preferred before me! As I sat on the form against the back wall, and between the coats hanging from the pegs, I had to reconcile myself to the fact that I was to be a listener and not the speaker. He preached on the subject of reconciliation which, he said, was illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32.

What is reconciliation?

The Oxford Dictionary defines 'reconciliation' as "the restoration of friendly relations". That is, it is the act of making peace or friends again after estrangement or disagreements, etc. It can also mean to make someone accept a disagreeable or unwelcome thing or situation (in my case, I became resigned to the fact that another was to preach). If the problem was a difference of opinion on a certain subject, then the two sides may agree to differ so that they can move on. In industrial, national or political disputes, the reconciliation usually involves both sides accepting a degree of compromise to pacify the situation and to restore working relationships on the basis of some jointly-ratified agreement or peace treaty.

But in Scripture, the idea of reconciliation goes much further than just making up again and it certainly does not involve any compromise by God. It means that God righteously accepts back to Himself those who have wronged Him into a close relationship with Him. God is unchanging in His holiness and therefore He will only accept back those people who change their hearts and attitudes about their sin. That is why Luke 15 majors on the need of repentance (Luke 15:7-10). But it is God grace which provides the way for people to be reconciled to Himself on the righteous basis of the expiatory sacrifice of His Son upon the Cross. Paul wrote to the Colossian believers. "*You, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works ... He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight*" (Colossians 1:21-22, New King James Version). Morrish's 'New & Concise Bible Dictionary' gives this definition: "By the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross, God annulled in grace the distance which sin had brought in between Himself and man, in order that all things might, through Christ, be presented agreeably to Himself. Believers are already reconciled, through Christ's death, to be presented holy, unblameable, and unproveable [before God]".

Yes, the Gospel teaches everyone that reconciliation is only possible because at the Cross, God removed the great distance which man's sin had caused. The doctrine of reconciliation is that people who believe this message, that is, they believe what God has done through Christ, are already reconciled. Spiritually, they have been brought into the very presence of God. They are holy, without blame and irreproachable - without even a single fault to show, as they stand before Him! Therefore, if I am reconciled, I am brought back to a right relationship or standard with a holy God, and I have peace with Him, when formerly I was at enmity with Him and far away from Him.

The doctrine of reconciliation

New Testament teaching on reconciliation is found in three major expositions of the Gospel by the Apostle Paul. So I will divide my comments up into three sections:

1. Reconciliation is all about what God has done (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2);
2. Reconciliation is rooted in the love of God (Romans 5:1-11);
3. Reconciliation is far-reaching in its effects (Colossians 1:18-23).

1. Reconciliation is all about what God has done (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2)

2 Corinthians is about Paul's service for His Lord. His motivation to serve God arose out of his knowledge of the terror of the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:11) and his love for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14). In 2 Corinthians 5:18 he traces his desire to see people saved back to God's motive. "*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation*" (2 Corinthians 5:18, New Revised Standard Version). We read in the Gospels that

the Lord Jesus showed the grace of God in His life and service. For example, in John 3:17 He said, *“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved”* (New King James Version). Paul expresses it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:19 (New King James Version), *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”* Everything that God could do to reach out to rebellious and sinful mankind He did through and by Christ. But His approach was rejected and the very people to whom the grace of God was manifested crucified His Sent One. It was then that God’s reconciling mercy triumphed because at the Cross, God *“made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore everyone who accepts these facts, that Christ was the Substitute who bore the judgement of God instead of us, is right before God in Christ. The distance that our sins brought in has been completely and permanently removed; and we are accepted in the Beloved!

The task of spreading this message, *“the word of reconciliation”*, was passed from Christ to His disciples. *“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”* (2 Corinthians 5:20). It could be that some listeners today have never come to God in repentance and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I would implore you to do so this very moment! I also *“plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”* (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). Get right with God for you are only guaranteed today, and not even tomorrow!

In 2 Corinthians 6:1, Paul calls believers *“fellow-workers with Christ.”* The idea flows out of 2 Corinthians 5:20. We are His ambassadors in an alien world which continues to be hostile to Him and to God. The hymn *“The King’s Business”* expresses this great privilege and responsibility of ours:

*I am a stranger here, within a foreign land
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;
Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea;
I’m here on business for my King.*

*I come to tell of One who gave His precious life,
That He might offer peace, and end the sinful strife.
This message I repeat ‘tis God who doth entreat,
And that’s my business for my King.*

*This is the King’s command, that all men everywhere
Repent and turn away from sin’s seductive snare
That all who will obey with Him shall reign for aye;
And that’s my business for my King.*

*This is the message that I bring
A message angels fain would sing:
‘Oh be ye reconciled!’
Thus saith my Lord and King,
‘Oh be ye reconciled to God!’*

Elijah T Cassel (1849-1930)

Let me return to the heading that ‘reconciliation is all about what God has done’. In Luke 15:20, the prodigal’s father saw him *“while he was still a great way off”*, that is, as he set out for home. His father hadn’t remained at home awaiting his return, he was out actively seeking him. The phrase *“a great way off”* equates to *“a far country”* in Luke 15:13. Yes, God’s unchanging in His stance against sin. Although He does not alter it, yet in His grace He has come to us *“in Christ”*. Then at the Cross *“He made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us”*. Luke 15 is actually one complete parable, (see Luke 15:3: *“this parable”* - singular). *“The Parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.”* It shows that God is intent on searching and seeking out lost sinners. The shepherd is the Lord Jesus, the Son of God; the Holy Spirit is the woman; and God is the father. Each Person in the Godhead is actively seeking the reconciliation of every lost individual! Hence the first part of Luke 15:20, *“he arose and came to his father”* illustrates repentance, which is the prime message of the whole parable (Luke 15:7, Luke 15:10). There’s no reconciliation without there first being repentance.

To recap, God, in His great love for the world, has never been indifferent about man’s fallen condition. From the very moment Adam and Eve sinned and were driven out of the Garden of Eden (See Genesis 3:1-24), God has been working out His plan of salvation. To remove the mighty gulf between Himself and lost men He made His son a sin offering at the Cross. Their sin took them far away from God. Therefore, they needed to be reconciled, not God! Remember, it was the prodigal who left his father and not the other way round.

2. Reconciliation is rooted in the love of God (Romans 5:1-11)

Romans 1:16-5:11 has been likened to a court in session with Romans 5:1-11 the outcome of the case. With respect to reconciliation, the predominant thought in Romans 5 is that believers have received every blessing from God "through" or "by" the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1 (English Standard Version) begins, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith". Paul uses "Therefore" at various points throughout the book of Romans to state a conclusion. But first, let's briefly review what has happened so far in this 'court'. After Paul presents the case against all of the different types of mankind in the opening chapters, the court is silenced by the Judge's verdict: "the whole world ... held accountable to God ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:19 and Romans 3:23, English Standard Version). But immediately the case takes a dramatic turn as the words "But now" of Romans 3:21 are heard. Not only has the Judge passed the sentence, but He has also provided the full payment, called "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24)! Any person who, by faith in God (Romans 3:27-4:25) believes Jesus "was delivered up [to death] for our trespasses and was raised [to life] for our justification" (Romans 4:25, English Standard Version), is justified by God. That person is freed from any charge or condemnation regarding his sins and also is made righteous by the same holy God. God is also right in doing this (Romans 3:26) because of Christ's expiatory sacrifice upon the Cross (Romans 3:24-26).

In Romans 5:1-11, the past, the present, and the future results of the Gospel for Christian believers are reviewed. The past is outlined in Romans 5:6-10. Romans 5:6 states we were both powerless - without any strength to help ourselves; and ungodly - without any desire either to live for God or to ask for His help. Romans 5:8 states we were sinners - without any relationship with a holy God. But, pertinent to our study of reconciliation and worst of all, Romans 5:10 states we were enemies of God, in active rebellion against Him and His declared will! (We can see how the prodigal son pictures these facts.) Now it's in this context that we discover for the first time in Romans the real secret of reconciliation. The Gospel proclaims that God is light and God is love (see 1 John 1:5). Amazingly, He offers His own love to us in our lost condition, holding it out, having manifested it in the death of His only Son. "God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, New King James Version). (In Luke 15, the father of the prodigal son is an apt picture of God the Father and His love for sinners.)

Finally, Romans 5:10 states we have been reconciled to God, that is, brought back from the distance of enmity and death - as illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son, when he returned from the far country to his father's house. Reconciliation places us before God with no distance between Him and us. It is a present position of grace, His unmerited favour, in which we possess the wonderful spiritual blessings listed in Romans 5:1-11. These include peace, joy, and hope - things which everyone in the world would like to possess.

- "Peace with God" (Romans 5:1) - no outstanding issues remain!
- "Access" (Romans 5:2) - the continuous ability to avail ourselves of God's favour. There are no barriers now!
- The gift of His Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), through whom we know God's love - not just a taste but a deluge flooding our hearts so that we appreciate all He has done, all that He is doing and all that He will do for us.
- The priestly intercession of Christ at God's right hand in heaven - we are being saved by His endless life (Romans 5:10).
- Best of all, reconciliation enables us to worship God in a living and true way - we joy, or boast, in God (Romans 5:11). A hymn sums it up:

*We joy in our God, and we sing of that love
So sovereign and free, which did His heart move,
When lost our condition, all ruined, undone,
He saw with compassion, and spared not His Son.*

*His Son, His delight, His loved One He gave
The wrath to endure, by suffering to save;
Sure love so amazing, unmeasured, untold,
Since Him it hath given, no good will withhold.*

*We praise then our God; how rich is His grace!
We were far from Him once, estranged from His face.
By blood we are purchased, are cleansed and made nigh,
And blessed in His presence, in Jesus on high.*

W Yerbury (d 1863)

Reconciliation also has a future meaning. That concerns the end times, when God displays His pleasure in, and through, Christ. The Gospel is not just a great escape, although Romans 5:9 (New King James Version) verifies "we

shall be saved from God's wrath through Him! The Gospel is about a bright future, *"the hope of the glory of God"* (Romans 5:2, New King James Version). Another cause of rejoicing!

3. Reconciliation is far-reaching in its effects (Colossians 1:18-23)

Colossians 1:21-22 (New King James Version) describes the depths of sinful man's condition and position before God as being *"alienated and enemies in ... mind by wicked works"*. Luke 15:13-19 graphically likens this to the lost son being far away from home, having wasted all that he was given, spent-up and perishing with hunger with no one willing to help him. But notice that Colossians 1:21 states that the world is also at enmity in their minds as well as by their wicked works. Romans 1 states this is a direct consequence of their wilful decisions not to acknowledge Him as Creator. Today, their philosophies and scientific hypotheses continue to exclude Him from their minds. And they continue to defiantly practise ungodliness and immorality. No wonder that God has given them over to vile lusts and passion and to debased minds! (See Romans 1:24).

By contrast, believers have been brought from these depths of depravity to be *"holy, and blameless, and above reproach in [God's] sight"* (Colossians 1:22, New King James Version). These changes were effected for us *"in the body of [Christ's] flesh through death"* (Colossians 1:22, New King James Version) and *"through the blood of His cross"* (Colossians 1:20, New King James Version). The Lord Jesus in His grace identified Himself with us by becoming a Man so that He could lay down His life and take it up again in resurrection. He offered His body as a sacrifice for sin.

In His Son's death on the Cross, where the extreme violence of men was seen, God acted to condemn sin and triumphed over every enemy. God is now able to reconcile believers from their repugnant sinful condition and position through Jesus' resurrection and place them "in Christ". What they were is completely done away with. *"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses"* (Colossians 2:11-13, New King James Version). These are some of the far reaching effects of the reconciliation of believers.

But there is more that God will do in the future through Christ. He has started anew with the One who is the Beginning of His new creation. According to Colossians 1:20, the death of Christ, the value of His precious blood, provides a righteous foundation for God *"to reconcile all things to Himself ... whether things on earth or things in heaven"* (Colossians 1:20, New King James Version) in the world to come and throughout the eternal state. However, there is no reconciliation of *"things under the earth."* In Philippians 2:10 (New King James Version), *"those under the earth"* are all unbelievers and all fallen spiritual beings who follow Satan. They're forced to confess and bow the knee to Jesus the Lord by the command of God the Father (see Philippians 2:10-11). Colossians 1:20 means that whatever sin has spoiled, and everywhere sin has entered, will be purged. When God decrees, all who are evil will be consigned to the place of eternal judgement to suffer God's wrath. Then, when all things in heaven and earth have been reconciled to Him, God's pleasure and glory will fill out the new heavens and the new earth through Christ, His Pre-eminent One. Yes, the far-reaching effects of reconciliation will bring believers into new creation blessings, where God is all in all!

Summary of our "Things that Accompany Salvation" series

This series has covered: forgiveness, justification, redemption and reconciliation. I bring my talk, and this series, to a close by referring to some comments of FB Hole in his book *"Salvation"* (ISBN: 9780901860170). *"Only when ... we realize ... the complete havoc ... wrought by sin [can we appreciate] the fullness of God's answer to it ... in the Gospel. ... That sin ... brought in guilt and so forgiveness must reach us; [that sin brought in] condemnation, so justification is needed; [that sin brought in] bondage, and so we need redemption; [that sin brought in] alienation from God, so we need reconciliation."* FB Hole's book, also contains other doctrines about the Gospel of our salvation. Therefore, God willing, we shall resume our series and talk on these remaining topics in late 2016.

Let's close with a worship hymn:

*O God of love, how measureless
Thy thoughts to us are shown!
More precious they than tongue can tell,
Their fullness none have known!*

*We can but bless Thee for the light
Which shines in Christ Thy Son,
The favour of Thy countenance,
Which He for us has won.*

*Our hearts are more than filled with joy,
Our cup indeed runs o'er,
And, Father, in Thy presence now
We worship and adore.*

*We boast in Thee, Thou Source of good,
Thy glory fills our sight,
Now reconciled through Jesus' death,
We praise with great delight.*

EC Rubie (1846-1942)

Amen!

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