

Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Some time ago the battery went dead in my watch and I took it up to the jewelry stop for have a new battery put in. After the Jeweler put the new battery in, he turned to a large clock on the wall and proceeded to set my watch according to that particular clock. What he was doing was *reconciling* my watch to the clock on the wall.

We sit down at least once a month (hopefully) and reconcile our bank account. That is, when we get our bank statement from the bank, we sit down and make sure that the figures that we have in our checkbook match those from the bank. When we adjust our balance to conform to the statement furnished by the bank, in the biblical sense of the word we are *reconciling* our account. So what we are going to talk about tonight is another one of those wonderful biblical doctrines entitled “reconciliation,” which means, “to cause to conform to a standard, to be adjusted to a specific standard.”

According to The Bible, the world is out of balance. The world does not conform to the standard that God has set. This is pictured for us very graphically in Romans 5:6 where Paul presents many details concerning the doctrine of reconciliation, when he says, “...when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” There are two statements in that verse that emphasize the fact that we do not conform to a divine standard. Paul says, first, “We were without strength,” and second, “We were ungodly.” The phrase “without strength” emphasizes our weakness, our total and complete inability to render ourselves acceptable to God or to conform to God’s standard. Even though we knew what God required, we were unable to conform ourselves to that requirement because we were “without strength.” But Paul says, in the second place, that we were “ungodly.” He emphasizes the fact that we do not conform. Not only are we without the ability to conform, but we actually do not want to conform to the standards that God has set.

Paul continues in verses 7-8, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” There we have the third evidence that we do not conform to God’s standard, for Paul says we were sinners. Paul was emphasizing not only the nature that controls us, but also the products of that nature. We were not only unable to conform to God’s standards, and actually did not want to conform to God’s standards, but

because of our ungodliness and unrighteousness, God characterized us a *sinner*s in His sight.

Paul continues in verse 9, “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” **This gives us the fourth evidence that we do not conform to God’s standards: we were objects of God’s divine wrath.** In other words, God had already passed judgment on all who were ungodly, unruly, and rebellious against His will for our lives, and the judgment was the wrath of God was upon us. But Paul goes on to say in verse 10, “...if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” **Paul says that we were enemies; this emphasizes the fact that our ungodliness, and our ignorance, and our weakness, and our sin were translated into overt acts of rebellion against God.** We were not stagnant in our sin and in our ungodliness; but our conduct was of such that Paul says, “we were enemies.” Therefore, Paul is saying that our *life*, as well as our *character*, did not conform to God’s standards.

It is very important that we should realize that God Himself is the standard by which He tests men. God has not set up a standard apart from Himself, from which He is detached and to which He asks men to conform. But God Himself is the unalterable, unchangeable standard by which men are tested. **And it is because men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God that there is need for reconciliation.** That is why, in Romans 3, Paul emphasizes the fact that “all have sinned and come short,” he is emphasizing the great need for reconciliation, the great need to be made to conform, or to be adjusted to the divine standard. You see, if we have a flexible standard, then all need for reconciliation disappears, for every man becomes a standard within himself, and the result is that “every man does what is right in his own eyes.” Therefore, God set His holiness as that inflexible standard by which men are tested and it becomes the standard to which are cause to be conformed.

Therefore, as we consider the scriptural teaching on reconciliation, we want to emphasize, first of all, the fact that God has reconciled the world to Himself. Listen to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:19, “...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses against them...” Notice that the Bible says that God was in Christ *reconciling the world*. Now the word “world” does not refer to the inhabited earth, that is, this globe on which we live, but rather to the world of those who, according to Romans 5, were called *weak* and *ungodly* and *sinner*s and *enemies* and who were under wrath. **God has changed the relationship of the world to Himself in order to conform the world to His standards.** Now, please do not misunderstand what I am saying

right here, because the Bible is *not* teaching that God has saved *all* men, nor that all men are now saved, nor that all men will ultimately be saved. Such thinking would contradict a great deal of teaching of the Word of God. **Rather, this emphasizes the fact that Christ has laid a foundation on which God may take His stand to reach out to sinners and bring them to Himself.** God could not arbitrarily bridge the gulf between Himself and sinful men. There must be some *basis* on which divine grace exercises itself, and manifest itself. And that *basis* is God in Christ Jesus, changing the relationship of the world to Himself so that men in the world are now savable.

When God created Adam and Eve and place them in the Garden of Eden, Adam and God enjoyed a face-to-face fellowship, the one to the other. It was God's custom to come into the Garden, as Genesis 3 tells us, in the cool of the day in order that He might walk and talk with Adam and Eve, so that they might enjoy sweet fellowship and companionship together. We really do not know how long that state continued, but we have the record given in Genesis 3 that that state was interrupted by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. **Adam and Eve deliberately and willfully turned their backs on God. Consequently, fellowship between God and Adam was not possible because God was holy and Adam was not a sinner.** Adam was weak, Adam was ungodly, Adam was not an enemy of God, and Adam was under wrath. Therefore, God had to turn His back on Adam because He could not continue in fellowship with an unholy creature. The privilege of face-to-face fellowship was totally and completely lost.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they became enemies of God – they didn't mean to but they did. And the world remained in that state until Jesus Christ came to reconcile the world to God. Christ was made a covering over for the sin of the world, and when Christ covered over, or made a propitiation for the sin of the world, God could turn His face back to mankind. And God, who had to turn His back on sinners, could, because of the work of Christ, now reach out to humanity with the invitation, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden." **The death of Christ gave God the basis for receiving men to Himself.** God was not reconciled to the world, but the world was reconciled to God. It was because of the death of Christ that the world was brought into this relationship with God, that is, the world was rendered savable.

The second fact concerning the doctrine of reconciliation is there was the reconciliation of the individual to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." **Whereas the death of Christ brought God into relationship to the world, man still is out of relationship to God and**

needs to be brought back into an intimacy of fellowship with God. Paul teaches us that the world has been reconciled to God. God's face is toward the world, inviting the world to Himself, but individuals in the world have their backs to God. They need to respond to God's invitation to be reconciled to God, to be adjusted to His standards, to be conformed to Him through Jesus Christ. This is the reconciliation of the individual to God.

In the third place, we must consider the scriptural teaching on the basis by which the world was reconciled to God, and sinners individually may be reconciled to God. Romans 5:10 says, "...if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..." It was Christ's death that reconciled the world to God, and made it possible for individual sinners to be reconciled to God.

In Ephesians 2:16 Paul points out that we were reconciled by the cross, "... that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." **In Ephesians Paul is speaking of Jew and Gentile, who, through the cross of Christ, are brought to conformity to God, and it is the cross of Christ that reconciles Jew and Gentile to God the Father.** We are reconciled by the cross.

Therefore, reconciliation is based on Christ's identification with sinners. 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." When Paul uses the word "for" in verse 21 he is giving us an explanation as to how reconciliation is possible. You and I can be adjusted to God's standard, because God made Christ to become *sin* for us. **The One who knew no sin, the One in whose lips had never been found guile, took on Himself our sin in order that He might bear our sins to the cross and offer Himself as an acceptable substitute to God for us, on our behalf, in our place.** And when Christ identified Himself with sinners and went to the cross on their behalf and in their place, He was making possible the doctrine of reconciliation. He was making it possible for God to conform the world to Himself, to adjust the world to His standard so that sinners in the world might find salvation because "Jesus paid it all." You can be adjusted to God, to God's standard, through Christ, by His death, by His cross, by His blood, and by His identification with sinners.

Christ in His death on the cross accomplished a great change. It was a positional change: the relationship of the world to God was changed, and the

world was rendered savable. But Christ in His death on the cross also made possible a second great change, and that is not positional; it is experimental: the change of the worldling to God. That is why Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, emphasized the doctrine of reconciliation.

But the story does not stop there. 2 Corinthians 5:18 tells us that God, “hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.”

God did not commit the ministry of reconciliation to angels, although angels would delight to preach the gospel if God gave them those instructions. God committed the ministry of reconciliation to believers – those of us who have been saved by His wonderful grace. The man who occupies the pulpit does not have one bit more responsibility in the ministry of reconciliation than the child of God who sits in the pew, for the scripture says that God has committed to “us” the ministry of reconciliation.

Listen, God has not called us to tell men they are ungodly, and weak, and enemies, and sinners, they already know that (they might not want to admit it, but they know it). God has called us to tell men how they might be reconciled to God. Our job is to love the lost and in that love and compassion point them the Christ.

We have an unchanging God, and that unchanging God demands that every created thing be conformed to Him. The lost person does that through the death of Christ, but to the believer, God moves us even further in our journey, and we are told to be conformed to the image of Christ, God’s Son.