

The Life and Theology of Paul: Victory and Reconciliation

Review

All the big ideas in Paul's thought work together:

- Jesus is the center of *history* – his resurrection changes *where* I am (already/not yet)!
- Jesus is the center of *identity* – union w/ him forever changes *who* I am (his “power grid”)
- Jesus is the center of *activity* – union w/ him changes *how* I live (allegiance to him v. code)
- Jesus is the center of *victory* – union w/ him reconciles me to both God and other people

Remembering the Big Story

- After the Fall of humanity in Eden, God had promised a Savior to Adam (Gen. 3.15), preserved Noah's family through catastrophic judgment (Gen. 6-9), then chose Abraham's family to carry the gospel (Gen. 12.1-3). Paul called God's promises to Abraham “the gospel” (Gal. 3.8).
 - Important: Paul sees the story of Abraham and his descendants (Israel) not as something *separate* from the big story of the gospel, but as something *integrated* with it: “The call of Abraham was the divine answer to the sin of Adam,” (Wright).
- Context of Abraham: In the aftermath of the Flood, humanity again defied God's command to “fill the earth” (Gen. 9.1) and instead determined to “build ourselves a city and a tower... let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth,” (Gen. 11.4).
 - In response to this, God confused languages, thereby dividing humanity into separate cultures and ethnicities (Gen. 11.5-9). It is *after* this that God calls Abram (Gen. 12.1-3).
 - Thus by the time God calls Abraham, sin has brought a double separation upon humanity:
 - *Vertical* separation – alienation from God our Creator
 - *Horizontal* separation – alienation between ourselves and other people/groups

Vertical Victory: Reconciliation to God

- Reconciliation with God is possible because Jesus' life and death provided a *double substitution*:

2 Cor. 5.17-21: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“he made him to be sin who knew no sin”

– Jesus took the blame for our sins

“in him we might become the righteousness of God”

– we share the credit of his perfection

= **Jesus paid for me & was perfect for me!**

- This double-substitution work of Jesus allows God to *justify* us (declare us righteous). We see this in what Leon Morris called “possibly the most important single paragraph ever written”:

Rom. 3.21-26: But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 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. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Justified – to be treated as righteous in God's sight: “[just] as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and [just] as if I had been as perfectly obedience as Christ was obedient for me” (*Heidelberg Catechism* #60)

Redemption – to buy back; “to ransom by the payment of a price” (John Murray, *Romans*)

Propitiation – to turn away wrath by taking away guilt

- Those who are justified God also *sanctifies* (makes us righteous in our lives) by progressively liberating us from idols that enslave us – **and the demonic powers that work through idols:**
 - Eph. 6.12:** We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
 - 1 Cor. 7.5:** ...so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.
 - 2 Cor. 4.4:** In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers...
 - Phil. 3.19:** ...their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.
 - Eph. 4.26-27:** ...do not let the sun go down on your anger... give no opportunity to the devil.
 - 1 Tim. 6.9:** But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare...
- cf. **Heb. 2.14-15:** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, [Jesus] himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Horizontal Victory: Reconciliation with People/Groups

- Reconciliation with God *must* lead to reconciliation with other Christians across traditional boundaries. Notice how two of the greatest passages on reconciliation with God (Rom. 3.21-26, Eph. 2.1-10) are *immediately* followed by teaching concerning reconciliation with others:
 - Rom. 3.28-30:** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one – who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.
 - Eph. 2.11-22:** Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the circumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – 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. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
- This theme of horizontal reconciliation was included in Paul’s original call to apostleship:
 - Acts 26.15-18:** And I said, “Who are you, Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”
- Therefore to refuse horizontal reconciliation amounts to denying the vertical victory of Christ:
 - Scholars over the last generation have wrestled with the question of whether the focus of Paul’s gospel was either personal forgiveness or the inclusion of the Gentiles... the two are mutually defining. Since the pagan powers had been defeated, like Pharaoh at the Exodus, all people were free to worship the One God. Since the defeat of the powers had been accomplished by Jesus’s death, through which sins were forgiven (the sins that kept humans enslaved to the powers in the first place), the barrier to Gentile inclusion in a new “sanctified” people had gone. “Forgiveness of sins” thus entails “Gentile inclusion,” and Gentile inclusion happens precisely because of “forgiveness of sins.” (Wright)
- Unity across ethnic, political, and social barriers may be difficult *existentially*. But it is not complicated *theologically*: Jesus has triumphed over every sin, every idol, and over every demon that stands behind them. He has forever broken the power behind the alienation of both Eden and Babel: the dark power of pride. To resist reconciliation is to deny this victory – to deny him.