

RECONCILIATION

In Romans 5, Paul once again brings up the subject of “justification” (5:1, 9). We know this is a key doctrinal word of grace because after he mentions it in Romans 3:24 and develops it in Romans 4, he mentions it again in Romans 5. In this very context, he mentions another word and it is the word “reconciliation” (Rom. 5:10-11). So clearly this is another key word of grace.

The actual Greek word “reconciliation” (καταλλάσσω) is one that means to change or exchange something for something else (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 236). It carries with it the idea of changing something completely. The verb allasso (αλλάσσω) means to exchange and the preposition kata (κατα) is added at the beginning which means throughout. Thus when you combine the words they mean “complete change” or “change throughout.” It was used in regard to money and it was used in regard to relationships.

The basic idea behind the concept of “reconciliation,” as Dr. Charles Ryrie writes, is “...a change of relationship from hostility to harmony and peace between two parties” (*Basic Theology*, p. 292). In the realm of theology, this idea means to completely change a relationship from hostility to harmony; from enemy to friend; from enmity to amity.

This is true in any kind of reconciliation. It assumes there is an estranged relationship between two parties that relationship needs to be harmonized (Matt. 5:24; I Cor. 7:11).

Now all people are in a hostile relationship with God, which is why they are admonished to be reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:18-21). We are not by nature a friend of God. The Bible is very clear on this point that reconciliation is needed. In reconciliation contexts, people have three major problems:

Problem #1 - All people are enemies of God. **Rom. 5:10**

Problem #2 - All people are sinners against God. **II Cor. 5:19, 21**

Problem #3 - All people are heading to the wrath of God. **Rom. 5:9**

It is very clear from these three problems that there is a need of complete change in one’s relationship with God. There is a desperate need of reconciliation.

Man is an enemy of God and heading to the wrath of God because he has sinned against God. A complete change is needed if there is to be peace between God and man. If sinful man is going to be on friendly terms with God, the relationship must be changed from hostility to harmony.

Now the New Testament is very clear and very specific to point out that one of the major accomplishments of the death of Jesus Christ was to make this reconciliation possible between sinful man and Holy God (**Romans 5:10-11; II Corinthians 5:18-21**).

What we clearly see here is that Jesus Christ is the only possible means for a sinner to be reconciled to God and brought into a peaceful relationship with God. There is no other possible way that man may be reconciled to God, for Jesus Christ is the only way of reconciliation in this relationship.

A critical passage of Scripture that is important to the doctrine of reconciliation is II Corinthians 5:18-21. In this passage it may be observed that there are two phases to reconciliation:

(Phase #1) - There is the positional or universal world reconciliation. **II Cor. 5:19**

Through the death of Jesus Christ, God completely changed the position of the world and made it savable. Through Christ's work on the cross, the world has the potential of being reconciled to God.

Through Christ's work on the cross, sinful people may be set free from the imputation of sin and given the imputation of righteousness, which completely changes their relationship with God from hostility to harmony.

It has been claimed by some that this verse teaches universalism, which would mean that all in the world had been reconciled to God or will be reconciled to God. However, upon careful reading of the passage we may observe that making the world savable is not the same as saving an individual.

In fact, God has commanded in this very text that we (those who are believers) take this message of reconciliation to the lost world. Obviously, if the world is universally saved or universally going to be saved, then everyone is in a peaceful relationship with God, and ambassadors for Christ are not needed (**v. 20**).

(Phase #2) - There is the individual and practical personal reconciliation. **II Cor. 5:20**

This is the personal and practical side of reconciliation, in which the individual believes on Jesus Christ and is completely changed from being a condemned sinner in a hostile relationship with God, to being a justified righteous person who now is eternally at peace with God.

Universal reconciliation makes reconciliation possible, whereas personal reconciliation makes reconciliation applicable.

There will be many people who will end up burning in everlasting fire in spite of the fact that the world was savable and so were they. No one will ever end up in the everlasting fires of hell who has personally been reconciled to God.

The message of reconciliation is that God, through the death of Jesus Christ, has made it possible for the world, which is in enmity with Him, to be saved. The potential of being saved is at the cross. This is the only spot where one may be reconciled to God.

One of the major theological debates concerning reconciliation is the debate of who changes in reconciliation: God or man? Another way to understand this is who is reconciled to whom? Is God reconciled to man or is man reconciled to God?

There have been different views on this issue:

View #1 - Some suggest God must be reconciled to sinful man and not sinful man to God.

This view says since God's righteousness has been violated and since God's wrath must be removed, and since God is in a hostile relationship with man because of sin, it is God who must completely change His perspective and position in regard to sinners.

The problem with this perspective is that it attacks the immutability of God. The Bible is very clear and specific to point out that it is not possible for God to change (Malachi 3:6).

View #2 - Some suggest reconciliation is a combination of change both in God and in man.

Dr. Louis Berkhof believed that God was reconciled to man in Christ's death and sinful man is reconciled to God when he accepts reconciliation. This view says that a complete change is needed in both God and man in order for reconciliation to occur. God changes His perspective of the world at the cross and the world changes its relationship with God by coming to the cross.

Again the problem with this view is the immutability of God. God is not the Person who needs to change anything about Himself. It is sinful man that needs to change.

View #3 - Some suggest reconciliation is a complete change in sinful man.

It is sinful man who must be reconciled to God. God is immutable, incapable of change and, biblically speaking, it is man who is completely changed to have peace with God.

Dr. Chafer said, "The Bible never asserts that God is reconciled. If it is supposed that God is represented as having changed completely His own attitude toward the world because of Christ's death, it will be remembered that it is His righteousness which is involved. Before the death of Christ, His righteousness demanded its required judgments, but after the death of Christ that same righteousness is free to save the lost" (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 92).

God does not reveal Himself to be changed. He, through the death of Christ, sees the world as changed so that it is now savable. When one believes on Christ, he is reconciled to God. What that means is that he is instantly changed from being in a hostile relationship with God to being in an harmonious relationship with God. Although God carries out these judicial matters, such as imputation of righteousness, He does so as the unchanging immutable God. The complete change and transformation occurs in man, not God.

(27)

There are some wonderful benefits one receives when one is reconciled to God:

Benefit #1 - We have positional and eternal peace with God. **Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20-21**

Reconciliation means we are no longer alienated from God and are no longer in a hostile enemy relationship with God.

Benefit #2 - We have eternal salvation. **Rom. 5:10**

Once we are reconciled to God through Christ, we are forever, fully and finally saved.

Benefit #3 - We have been set free from the O.T. condemnatory Law. **Eph. 2:14-18**

Once we have been reconciled to God, the O.T. condemnatory law is no longer our enemy. We are free in Christ and out from under the law.

Benefit #4 - We have a harmonious relationship with God in connection to Israel.
Eph. 2:11-14

Through Christ's reconciliatory work on the cross, those of us who are non-Jewish can now have a relationship with God. The barrier between Jew and Gentile is broken through Christ.

Benefit #5 - We have a whole new purpose for our troubles and trials. **Rom. 5:1-5**

Trials for the believer are character development agents. For the unbeliever, tribulation and trials are designed to break them down and bring them to Christ. For the believer, tribulation and trials are designed to build up our character. One who has been reconciled to God has a whole new dimension to trouble and trials.

Benefit #6 - We have the privilege and responsibility to proclaim reconciliation.
II Cor. 5:18-20

We have the great privilege of sharing the message of reconciliation. It is our responsibility to inform others that Jesus Christ is the only way one may be reconciled to God.