

Reconciliation-Katallage (Greek Word Study)

RECONCILIATION: FROM [ENMITY](#) TO [AMITY](#)

The Greek word **katallage** means **reconciliation** and is used only by the apostle Paul in four passages. In Romans 5:11 Paul says believers have "**received reconciliation**" (which implies that it is a gift). In Romans 11:15 Paul uses **katallage** to describe "the reconciliation of the world" as a result of the majority of the Jews rejecting salvation in the Messiah ([see below](#)). Now as a result of our salvation (and reconciliation) to God by grace through faith, all believers have the priceless privilege of the "**ministry of reconciliation**" (2 Cor 5:18) and the powerful provision of reconciliation because we have "**the word of reconciliation.**" (2 Cor 5:19). In all four uses of **katallage**, God is portrayed as the *Reconciler* and sinners as the ones *reconciled*. Men are the ones who broke the relationship with God as recorded plainly in Isaiah "*But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.*" (Isaiah 59:2) In sum, reconciliation with God is not something we do, but something God provides and we receive.

Hastings adds that "The gospel, in the Pauline acceptation, is peculiarly a message of reconciliation (καταλλαγή). The ministry of the gospel is a 'ministry of reconciliation.' Its preaching is a 'word of reconciliation.' Its design is that those who receive the message should 'be reconciled to God' (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)." ([Ref](#))

Rod Mattoon writes that "The basic meanings of the word **reconcile** are "to remove enmity between two enemy parties" or "to change thoroughly." Reconciliation is more than having our sins forgiven and divine justice being satisfied. It means to change something inside out, upside down, and right side up. It refers to a changed relationship between God and the lost world....Reconciliation is a divine provision by which God's holy displeasure against alienated sinners is appeased. His hostility against men is removed. A harmonious relationship between the Lord and the saved sinner is established. Reconciliation occurs because God in His grace was willing to design a way to have all the sins of those who have put their faith in Christ covered by His blood. Through the work of the Cross, Jesus Christ has brought man and God together again by paying the price for man's sins. Men, however, must accept what Christ has done on Calvary. Multitudes, however, think they have a better way. "Religion" or good works are man's feeble efforts to be reconciled to God, but those efforts are destined to fail. Those who have trusted in Christ have a ministry of reconciliation. The grip of a great God mandated us with the ministry of reconciliation. It is our responsibility to share with others what Christ has done for them so they can be reconciled to God. When God grips your life, you will be concerned about the souls of people. This is our ministry. (2 Corinthians Commentary)

John MacArthur adds that **reconciliation** "is not what (man) *accomplishes* but what he *embraces*. **Reconciliation** does not happen when man decides to stop rejecting God but when God decides to stop rejecting man. It is a divine provision by which God's holy displeasure against alienated sinners is appeased, His hostility against them removed, and a harmonious relationship between Him and them established. Reconciliation occurs because God was graciously willing to design a way to have all the sins of those who are His removed from them "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12), "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19), and "cast all [their] sins behind [His] back" (Isa. 38:17). In the most magnanimous expression of sacrificial love the universe will ever know, God reconciled believers to Himself through Christ; that is, at His expense. God the Son's perfect sacrifice is the only one that could satisfy the demands of God the Father's holy justice. Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5; cf. Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). God, for His own purpose and by His own will, designed the sacrificial death of His Son to reconcile believers to Himself (Eph 2:13-16-[note](#)). "[Christ] has now reconciled [us] in His fleshly body through death," making us "holy and blameless and beyond reproach" in the sight of God (Col. 1:22-[note](#)). "Now once at the consummation of the ages [Jesus Christ] has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26-[note](#)); "He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12-[note](#)). His sacrifice propitiated God's holy wrath (Rom. 3:25-[note](#); Heb. 2:17-[note](#); 1 John 2:2-[note](#); 1 John 4:10-[note](#)), making reconciliation possible." (2 Corinthians Commentary)

T C Smith writes that **reconciliation** is "The establishment of friendly relations between parties who are at variance with each other, making peace after an engagement in war, or readmission to the presence and favor of a person after rebellion against the person. In 1525 William Tyndale, in his translation of the New Testament from the Greek text, attempted to discover an English word that would express the true meaning of the Greek **katallage** as well as the Latin reconciliation. Unable to find the word, he coined one. The word he coined was *atonement* (at-one-ment), and he used it in Romans 5:11. The *King James Version* committee followed Tyndale and used atonement. More recent versions and translations have returned to "reconciliation," largely because the word *atonement* has been encumbered with various theories of atonement." ([See the complete article in the Holman Bible](#))

[Dictionary](#))

Reconciliation (2643) (**katallage** from **katá** = an intensifier + **alláso** = change - see study of verb **katallasso**) literally means an exchange and then a profit from exchange ("the profits of the money-changer" - Liddell-Scott). The NT uses **katallage** figuratively to describe the change from a state of **enmity** between persons to one of **friendship**. **Katallage** pictures the reestablishment of an interrupted or broken relationship. In the New Testament **katallage** refers to God's reconciliation of the world to Himself through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Because of sin, unbelievers are God's enemies (Ro 5:10), but they can be reconciled to God through faith in Christ (2 Co 5:18-19).

As noted in the derivation above **katallage** is a compound word derived from the verb **alláso** which means to change. In classical Greek **alláso** itself was used to express changing shape, or color, or appearance. It was also used in the sense of to exchange or to barter; and so was not infrequently used of taking one thing in exchange for another. **Barclay** writes that **allasso** was "used of one who in misfortune exchanges one sorrow for another."

The classical meaning of the related verb form **katallasso** is "to bring together again people who have been estranged." And so we see the verb **katallasso** in 1 Cor 7:1 stating that a wife who is estranged from her husband is either not to marry or is to "be **reconciled** to her husband." **Vincent** adds that **katallasso** "means primarily to exchange, and hence to change the relation of hostile parties into a relation of peace; to reconcile." **Wuest** writes that "The simple verb **katallassō**, means "to reconcile those that are at **variance**." God and the sinner are at variance because of sin. In salvation the believing sinner is brought into a state in which he is yielded and obedient to God, willingly, of his own free will and accord."

Another word **hilasterion** is similar but distinct because in **katallage** man is reconciled to God while in **hilasterion** God's righteousness is satisfied.

United Bible Society on **katallage** - being put into friendship with God; leading others to be put into friendship with God

W E Vine writes that **katallage** means "primarily "an exchange," denotes "reconciliation," a change on the part of one party, induced by an action on the part of another; in the NT, the "reconciliation" of men to God by His grace and love in Christ. The word is used in Romans 5:11; 11:15 . The occasioning cause of the world-wide proclamation of "reconciliation" through the Gospel, was the casting away (partially and temporarily) of Israel. A new relationship Godward is offered to the Gentiles in the Gospel. The word also occurs in 2 Corinthians 5:18,19 , where "the ministry of reconciliation" and "the word of reconciliation" are not the ministry of teaching the doctrine of expiation, but that of beseeching men to be "reconciled" to God on the ground of what God has wrought in Christ. ([Reconcile, Reconciliation](#))

Katallage originally was used in Greek to describe an exchange (or profit from exchange), especially of money (of the business of money changers, exchanging equivalent values). This word group then began to acquire a wider sense of exchanging any one thing for another. Aristotle, for instance, speaks of professional and mercenary soldiers who are willing to barter their lives for trifling gain. And then the meaning came to be more than anything else, the change of enmity into friendship, as in the present passage.

Thayer describes **katallage** as "the restoration of the favor of God to sinners that repent and put their trust in the expiatory death of Christ."

Donald Barnhouse on the Greek idea of reconcile - The Greek word translated "reconciled" comes from the world of the moneychanger. If you give two dimes and a nickel in exchange for a quarter, or vice versa, you have made an equal exchange. This was the original meaning of the word as used by Aristotle and others. Later the word was used for the adjustment of a difference in business dealings, and finally for a difference between two personalities who had become estranged. The transition from the material to the emotional and psychological was made, and the word was used as in Shakespeare's Richard III: "I desire to reconcile me to his friendly peace." (See the full message where Barnhouse disagrees with Thayer - Romans 5:9-10 Reconciliation)

Katallage is used 4 times in the NT...

Romans 5:11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the **reconciliation**.

Romans 11:15 (note) For if their (the Jews) rejection be the **reconciliation** of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Amplified Version - For if their rejection and exclusion from the benefits of salvation were [overruled] for the reconciliation of a world to God, what will their acceptance and admission mean? [It will be nothing short of] life from the dead!

Wuest - The word "if" which Paul uses throughout his argument here is not ean (αν), the "if" of a hypothetical condition, but ei (ε), the "if" of a fulfilled condition. Paul is not arguing upon the basis of an

hypothesis, but upon the basis of facts. The translation should read, "since," or "in view of the fact." The casting away of Israel the nation, refers to the act of God setting Israel aside *temporarily* as a channel through which to bring the good news of salvation to the world, and the substitution of the Church, this with a view to bringing Israel back into fellowship with Himself and service in the Millennium. This resulted in a direct ministry to the Gentiles and the rise of the latter as the heralds of salvation. This occurred actually in A.D. 70 when God dispersed Israel over the then known world. **Through the acceptance of the Gospel message, the unsaved are reconciled to God in the sense that their attitude of unbelief and hatred is turned to one of trust and love.** The receiving of Israel refers to that wonderful moment when, as the Messiah returns to the Mt. of Olives (Zech. 14) all Israel shall be saved (Rom. 11:26). This will be "life from among the dead" in that the nation will be saved by the sovereign grace of God out from a spiritually dead state and from among those who remain spiritually dead.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 Now all these things (2 Cor 5:14-17 - describing the total transformation which takes place at conversion) are from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of **reconciliation**. (in the gospel)

Amplified Version - But all things are from God, Who through Jesus Christ reconciled us to Himself [received us into favor, brought us into harmony with Himself] and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation [that by word and deed we might aim to bring others into harmony with Him]. It was God [personally present] in Christ, reconciling and restoring the world to favor with Himself, not counting up and holding against [men] their trespasses [but cancelling them], and committing to us the message of reconciliation (of the restoration to favor).

MacArthur - Sinners cannot be reconciled to Him on their own terms. Unregenerate people have no ability to appease God's anger against sin, satisfy His holy justice, or conform to His standard of righteousness. They are guilty of fatally violating God's law and face eternal banishment from His presence. The deadly, deceptive premise of all false religion is that sinners, based on their own moral and religious efforts and achievements, can reconcile themselves to God. But God alone designed the way of reconciliation, and only He can initiate the reconciliation of sinners; that God ... reconciled us to Himself is precisely the good news of the gospel. God so loved the world that He made the way of reconciliation. He desired to reconcile sinners to Himself—to make them His children. Such a desire is not foreign to God's holy character but consistent with it. One of the glorious realities of God's person is that He is a Savior by nature. (2 Corinthians Commentary)

Katallage is used in the Apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees 5:20 - "Therefore, the Place itself, having shared in the people's misfortunes, afterward participated in their good fortune; and what the Almighty had forsaken in his anger was restored in all its glory, once the great Sovereign **became reconciled.**" Katallage is also used in Isaiah 9:4 but that use does not add any significant insight (in my opinion).

Barclay summarizes the truths about **reconciliation** writing that...

First and foremost, Paul sees the work of Jesus Christ as above and beyond all else a work of reconciliation. Through that which he did, the lost relationship between man and God is restored. Man was made for friendship and fellowship with God. By his disobedience and rebellion he ended up at enmity with God. That which Jesus did took that enmity away, and restored the relationship of friendship which should always have existed, but which was broken by man's sin.

It is to be carefully noted that Paul never speaks of God being reconciled to men, but always of men being reconciled to God. The most significant of all the passages, 2 Cor 5:18-20, three times speaks of God reconciling man to himself. It was man, not God, who needed to be reconciled. Nothing had lessened the love of God; nothing had turned that love to hate; nothing had ever banished that yearning from the heart of God. Man might sin, but God still loved. It was not God who needed to be pacified, but man who needed to be moved to surrender and to penitence and to love.

Here then we are face to face with an inescapable truth. The effect of the Cross—at least in this sphere of the thought of Paul—was on man, and not on God. The effect of the Cross changed, not the heart of God, but the heart of man. It was man who needed to be reconciled, not God. It is entirely against all Pauline thought to think of Jesus Christ pacifying an angry God, or to think that in some way God's wrath was turned to love, and God's judgment was turned to mercy, because of something which Jesus did...

When we look at it in Paul's way, it was man's sin which was turned to penitence, man's rebellion which was turned to surrender, man's enmity which was turned to love, by the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ upon the Cross. It cost that Cross to make that change in the hearts of men. ([Barclay, William: New Testament Words: Westminster John Know Press, 1964](#))

Leon Morris emphasizes that "Since the New Testament never speaks of God as being reconciled, and some conclude that reconciliation means no more than a change in sinful people. But it is the wrath of God, not of people, that has to be dealt with, the demand of God that we live uprightly that must be reckoned with. Moreover, Romans 5:11 speaks of receiving reconciliation, which was thus in some sense wrought before we received it. It is also true that the first change is not in the sinner's *feelings*, but in his *state* (Gifford). The death of Christ puts away our sin, which had aroused not our opposition but God's." ([The Epistle to the Romans. W. B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press](#))

Richards sums up some of the truths on **reconciliation**...

- (1) It is human beings who need reconciliation; their sinful attitude toward God must change.
- (2) God has acted in Christ to accomplish reconciliation, so that with our sins no longer counted against us, believers no longer have a basis for counting God as an enemy.
- (3) When we come to believe the gospel, we experience a psychological and spiritual change, as our attitude is brought into harmony with the divine reality.

We who once were enemies "rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ro 5:11). In pagan religions, human beings might bring offerings designed to win the affection of some wounded deity. Only in Christian faith, however, does God take the initiative to win, at terrible cost, the affection of those who have wounded him by their sins ([Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Regency](#))