

# Reconciliation-Enmity to Amity

**Enmity** is a feeling of hostility, antagonism, animosity or ill will between two parties.

**Amity** describes a cooperative and supportive relationship between parties.

**Reconciliation** describes a state in which there has occurred a change of relationship from [enmity](#) to [amity](#), from [hostility](#) to [harmony](#), from [discord](#) to [concord](#), from [estrangement](#) to [friendship](#).

**Why does man need reconciliation?** Sin causes man to be at enmity to and hostile with God. (Romans 5:10)

**What is the result of absence of reconciliation?** Man is estranged and separated from God. (Isaiah 59:2)

**How is reconciliation realized?** God took the initiative in reconciliation! The Cross of Christ, resulted in the death of God's Son making reconciliation possible. (Ro 5:10) Reconciliation is personally realized by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. God's answer man's alienation is reconciliation, initiated by Christ's work on the Cross. To say it another way, "the position of the world was changed by His death so that all men are now able to be saved. His death rendered the whole world savable, yet salvation is applied to those who believe." (Fruchtenbaum)

**Who is the object of reconciliation?** Man needs to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:19, Ro 5:10). Some say God needs to be reconciled but the two passages quoted show it is man who needs to be reconciled.

In English [reconciliation](#) means the reestablishing of cordial relations, getting two things (people, groups, countries, etc) to correspond, to call back into union and friendship the affections which have been alienated, to restore to friendship or favor after estrangement. **Reconciliation** is derived from Latin *reconciliatio* which means to bring together creating a re-establishing, reinstatement, restoration or renewal. The Latin word *reconcilio* is from from *re-* which means "back" or "again," + *conciliāre* which means to make friendly, to [conciliate](#) anew, to bring together again, to win over again. One dictionary says **reconciliation** describes a new and friendly relationship with someone you have had an argument or a fight (e.g., spouses, family members, etc). The verb **reconcile** means to restore to [harmony](#), to settle or resolve, to find a way to make ideas, beliefs, needs, etc that are opposed to each other capable of existing together. To bring into accord, causing opponents to come to terms. Ryrie says "Reconciliation means a change of relationship from hostility to harmony and peace between two parties." (Ryrie's Basic Theology) "The bringing together of two or more parties into unity, harmony, or agreement by removing the cause of disharmony is called reconciliation." (C. Swindoll)

The chart below shows the usage of the word reconciliation over the past 200 years.

## Usage of "Reconciliation" Over Time

At the outset the reader should understand that **the goal of this article** is not to give a comprehensive dissertation on the **doctrine of reconciliation**. The main goal is to give a number of quotes, stories, illustrations and sermon excerpts which will help you apply this doctrine of [enmity](#) to [amity](#)" in the realm of interpersonal relationships (including marriage)!

First let's look at every occurrence of the word reconcile (reconciliation, etc) in the Bible (NAS95). Observe that there are 15 occurrences in 12 verses and they are all in the New Testament. While reconcile does not occur in the Old Testament, clearly the concept of reconciliation is present repeatedly. For example, every covenant God initiates with man is His seeking to reconcile unholy men with the Holy One. We also see man to man reconciliation, most beautifully portrayed in the story of Joseph's reconciliation with his estranged family. The concept of reconciliation is progressively revealed throughout the redemptive story of Scripture and it comes to its consummation in the New Testament when Jesus cried out the incredible word "Tetelestai!" which means "It is finished!" signifying that the price for sin has been paid in full. As Charles Ryrie puts it "'It is finished!' (John 19:30) was the cry of victory in the hour of seeming defeat. The plan of salvation stands completed. This involved especially the work of redemption from sin, reconciliation of man, and propitiation of God. His work was completely done." And so on the Cross a way of reconciliation was made available for any soul who would place their trust in Jesus' substitutionary, fully atoning death in their place. Jesus became the Reconciler flinging wide open the gates so that sinful men could be brought back into communion with their Creator, God the Father. Hallelujah! What a Savior! What a Reconciler! So with that synopsis, let's look at the New Testament passages which use the word reconcile (or some variation thereof), most describing the reconciliation of men to God, but some describing the reconciliation of men to men. Notice that for more in depth exposition of these passages, click on the **"-note"** (except Acts 7:26 and 1 Cor 7:11).

**MAN TO MAN** - Matthew 5:24-[note](#) leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be **reconciled** to

your brother, and then come and present your offering.

**MAN TO MAN** - Acts 7:26 "On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to **reconcile** them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?'

**MAN TO GOD** - Romans 5:10-[note](#) For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled**, we shall be saved by His life.

**MAN TO GOD** - Romans 5:11-[note](#) And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the **reconciliation**.

**MAN TO GOD** - Romans 11:15-[note](#) For if their rejection is the **reconciliation** of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

**MAN TO MAN** - 1 Corinthians 7:11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be **reconciled** to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

**MAN TO GOD** - 2 Corinthians 5:18-[note](#) Now all these things are from God, who **reconciled** us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**,

**MAN TO GOD** - 2 Corinthians 5:19-[note](#) 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**.

**MAN TO GOD** - 2 Corinthians 5:20-[note](#) Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God.

**MAN TO MAN** - Ephesians 2:16-[note](#) and might **reconcile** them (Jews and Gentiles) both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (While verse 16 speaks primarily of men to men, Eph 2:14-16 shows that the reconciliation of men to men is the result of reconciliation of both Jews and Greeks to God).

**MAN TO GOD** - Colossians 1:20-[note](#) and through Him to **reconcile** all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

**MAN TO GOD** - Colossians 1:22-[note](#) yet He has now **reconciled** you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--

**Guzik** - This is the result of God's work of reconciliation. Taken together, these words show that in Jesus we are pure and can't even be justly accused of impurity.

**Arnold Fruchtenbaum** summarizes these New Testament passages on reconciliation:

**(1) In Relationship to Human Reconciliation** - The first usage refers to mere human reconciliation. It is used in human terms when two people at odds with each other are reconciled (Mat. 5:23–24; 1 Cor. 7:11)

**(2) In Relationship to Israel's Future Reconciliation** - A second usage of reconciliation is that of Israel's future reconciliation, when Israel, as a nation, will be reconciled back to God (Rom. 11:15).

**(3) In Relationship to the Church** - A third usage is of the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles into one body, which is now happening in the Church (Eph. 2:16). (Messianic Study Bible)

**Wayne Grudem** defines **reconciliation** as follows - The removal of enmity and the restoration of fellowship between two parties. ....To overcome our separation from God, we needed someone to provide reconciliation and thereby bring us back into fellowship with God. Paul says that God "through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:18-19-[note](#)). (In Matthew 5:23-24-[note](#)) Jesus here tells us that whenever we come to worship we should be sure that our relationships with others are right, and if they are not, we should act quickly to make them right and then come to worship God. This admonition ought to be especially true when we come to the Lord's Supper.....In fact, John says that anyone who says, "I love God" but hates his brother "is a liar" (1 John 4:20). Husbands particularly need to make sure they are living "considerately" with their wives, and honoring them, in order that their prayers "may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). And the entire church is responsible to watch "that no 'root of bitterness' spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled" (Heb. 12:15)—an indication that sin and broken relationships among a **few** can spread to **many** and result in the withholding of God's blessing from the whole congregation. ([Systematic Theology](#))

**The Westminster Catechism** speaks to the need of reconciliation between brothers (or sisters) in Christ - "As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof; upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find

mercy; so, he that [scandalizeth](#) his brother, or the church of Christ, ought to be willing, by a private or public confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended, who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him."

**John Eadie** on **reconcile, reconciliation** - These terms as used by the sacred writers imply the restoration of man to the favour and grace of God through the atonement made by Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). They suppose a previous state of variance and hostility, such as must necessarily exist between beings so perfectly opposite in character as the holy God and his fallen, sinful creature, man (Rom. 7:5–25). Two distinct terms are employed in the New Testament, and are both thus rendered. The one of them used in Matt. 5:24 seems to denote mutual reconciliation—"be reconciled to thy brother;"—make him, if possible, one with thee. God reconciles the world, as he does not impute men's trespasses unto them. Men, who were enemies, the objects of God's judicial displeasure, are reconciled by the death of Christ; that is, the death of Christ enables God to forgive sin, in harmony with the strict requirements of his law. (See ATONEMENT.) When the Philistines suspected that David would appease the anger of Saul, by becoming their adversary, they said, "Wherewith should he reconcile himself to his master? Should it not be with the heads of these men?" not surely, How shall he remove his own anger against his master? but how shall he remove his master's anger against him? The injunction, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee," means, "see that thy brother be reconciled to thee," since that which goes before, is not that he hath done thee an injury, but thou him. ([Biblical Encyclopedia](#))

**David Guzik** rightly observes that "In the work of reconciliation, God didn't meet us halfway. God meets us all the way and invites us to accept it. One may use two different ways of understanding human need and God's salvation. We can see God as the judge, and we are guilty before Him. Therefore, we need forgiveness and justification. We can see God as our friend, and we have damaged our relationship with Him. Therefore, we need reconciliation. Both of these are true; neither one should be promoted at the expense of the other."

For more detailed discussion of the theology of the doctrine of reconciliation see the following resources.

#### RESOURCES ON RECONCILIATION:

- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Reconciliation](#)
- Nave Topical Bible [Reconciliation](#)
- Torrey Topical Textbook [Reconciliation with God](#)
- American Tract Society [Reconciliation](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Reconciliation](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Reconciliation](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Reconciliation](#)
- CARM Theological Dictionary [Reconcile, reconciliation](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Reconciliation](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Reconciliation](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Reconciliation](#), [Reconciliation](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Reconcile](#), [Reconciliation](#), [Reconciliation](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Reconciliation](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Reconcile; Reconciliation](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Reconciliation](#)

**GREEK WORD STUDIES RELATED TO RECONCILIATION** - "There are four different Greek words translated into the English word "reconciliation," but they all emphasize the same point: the position of the world was changed by the death of Jesus so that all men are now able to be saved; His death rendered the whole world savable. This does not mean that the whole world will be saved, because salvation is only applied to those who believe. While on one hand, God is said to be propitiated; on the other hand, man is said to be reconciled." (Fruchtenbaum)

- Reconcile ([2644](#)) [katallasso](#)
- Reconcile ([604](#)) [apokatallasso](#)
- Reconciliation ([2643](#)) [katallage](#)
- Reconcile (be reconciled) ([1259](#)) [diallasso](#)

As noted above the following discussion is a veritable [potpourri](#) of quotes, illustrations, and sermon snippets that have to do with the doctrine of reconciliation. There is not necessarily any "order" or flow of thought, but hopefully the reader will find information which is edifying and equipping regarding the wonderful truth of reconciliation available between God and man and also between

man (woman) and man!

**Spurgeon** observes that "One of the most glorious evidences of a man being reconciled to God is when he rejoices in God (cp 'We also **exult** in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have now received the **reconciliation** [katallage] -- Romans 5:11). Suppose he becomes obedient to certain outward precepts. That he may be, and yet be very sorry that he has to be obedient to them. Suppose he begins to repent and mourn to think that he has sinned. He may do that, and yet there may be latent in his heart the wish that he could have his fill of sin without fear of punishment. But when a man feels, "There is no one in the world that I love as I love God. For Him I would live, for Him I would die; He is everything to me," **that man is perfectly reconciled to God**. You can see that the enmity in his heart is slain."

**SAVED FROM THE BELL** - During the seventeenth century, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, sentenced a soldier to be shot for his crimes. The execution was to take place at the ringing of the evening curfew bell. However, the bell did not sound. The soldier's fiancée had climbed into the belfry and clung to the great clapper of the bell to prevent it from striking. When she was summoned by Cromwell to account for her actions, she wept as she showed him her bruised and bleeding hands. Cromwell's heart was touched and he said, "Your lover shall live because of your sacrifice. Curfew shall not ring tonight!" Like that condemned man, we are all rebels against God under a sentence of death. But He loved us so much that He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, to intervene in our behalf. He has saved us at great cost to Himself. If skeptics had questioned Jesus after His resurrection, all He would have had to do is show them His hands—His bruised, nail-pierced hands. They are ample proof that He has given Himself for mankind. ([Henry Bosch](#))

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild --  
God and sinners reconciled."  
-- Wesley

**Lewis Drummond** - "It may well be that the most relevant aspect of salvation to our post-modern day centers in the truths implied by the word reconciliation. It has already been pointed out in some detail that we all live in a three-fold relationship—to God, our fellows and ourselves. The rupturing of these vital relationships constitutes the tragedy of sin. Reconciliation means the restoring of these essential and vital relationships, and post-moderns zealously seek out relationships." (Reaching Generation Next)

**Many people are desperately looking for reconciliation in our broken world as illustrated by the following story.** The Spanish have a story about a father and son who had become estranged. The son left home and the father set out to find him. He searched for many months with no success. Finally, in desperation, the father took out a newspaper ad that read, "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." On Saturday, 800 men named Paco showed up looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers. Woe! (Steven Cole)

If we are to be reconciled with others, we must understand the nature of reconciliation and the perspective needed for it, and we must take action to bring about reconciliation. As **George MacDonald** said "In God Alone can man meet man."

**Spurgeon** agrees writing that "Our love ought to follow the love of God in one point, namely, in always seeking to produce reconciliation. It was to this end that God sent his Son. Has anybody offended you? Seek reconciliation." "Oh, but I am the offended party." So was God, and He went straight ahead and sought reconciliation."

Many reconciliations have broken down because both parties have come prepared to forgive and unprepared to be forgiven or unprepared to forget (perhaps not actually but effectively, so to speak). Spurgeon asks "Suppose that someone had grievously offended any one of you, and that he asked your forgiveness, do you not think that you would probably say to him, 'Well, yes, I forgive you; but I—I—I—cannot forget it'? Ah! dear friends, that is a sort of forgiveness with one leg chopped off, it is a lame forgiveness, and is not worth much."

In Ro 5:10KJV the rendering of the Authorized Version of the Greek word **katallage, atonement**, is surely wrong. The word means **reconciliation**. The word **atonement** is an Old Testament word, referring to the covering of sin. It is not found at all in the New Testament, for sin is there not simply covered by the death of Christ, but paid for and removed. When Christ died, he not only paid the debt for our sins but reconciled us to God by satisfying the Father's wrath.

**Harry Ironside** wrote "It is the glory of the Gospel that it reveals the heart of God going out after men in their sins, and it tells what He has done in order that man may obtain peace with God. It tells of Christ come from the bosom of the Father, from the glory that He had with the Father before the worlds were made, become in grace a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, and going to the cross, that dreadful cross, where He was made a curse for us in order that God and man might be brought together in **perfect harmony**, and **we might be reconciled to God by His death**. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And yet that wondrous life could not in itself settle the sin question or recover man to God. In

order to do this He must die, and having died He has manifested the fact that there is no enmity on God's part toward man; all the enmity is on our side; and now He is beseeching us to be reconciled to God."

**Steven Cole** in speaking about Biblical forgiveness says that **reconciliation** with the offender as far as is Biblically possible should be our goal. He reasons that "God forgives us so that we may be **reconciled** to Him and enjoy a close relationship with Him. When we forgive others, we should also **seek to restore the broken relationship**. This does not always mean becoming best of friends, but it should at least mean that we are cordial and friendly towards the person. To say, "I forgive you, but I never want to see your ugly face again," is not to forgive as God forgives! **Of course, if the offender does not truly repent of his sin, we cannot be truly reconciled or in a close relationship**. But even then, we are still commanded to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:27-28). So, biblical forgiveness is a decision to release the offender from the guilt of his sin, to refuse to bring up the offense to use against him, to refuse to think about the offense, to refuse to talk to others about the offense, and to **be reconciled to the offender if possible**." (Ephesians 4:32 [How Can I Ever Forgive?](#))

When individuals trust Jesus as their Savior, they are reconciled to God and are motivated to be peacemakers in their own world of relationships—even with their enemies. To be sure, we are never more like Jesus than when we seek reconciliation. Husband, perhaps an angry word has flown out of your mouth, like "That's it, we're getting a divorce!" After you have confessed your sinful anger, ask the Spirit of God to enable you to initiate the process of reconciliation. You can't do it by yourself. God never said you could. But His Spirit in you can and He always said He would.

**D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** observed in his book "God's Way of Reconciliation" on Ephesians 2 that "In order to measure the love of God you have first to go down before you can go up. You do not start on the level and go up. We have to be brought up from a dungeon, from a horrible pit; and unless you know something of the measure of that depth you will only be measuring half the love of God."

**John Stott** - It is the devil who is a troublemaker; it is God who loves reconciliation and who now through his children, as formerly through his only begotten Son, is bent on making peace.

**T W Hunt** - Parties at war are in a **precarious** position. The **reconcilers** bring **harmony** to broken relationships. Doing that is like God, it is the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16)...Humble people are able to make peace. They are reconcilers. Peace may require yielding, and the humble will yield. Proud people create strife. Self-centeredness will not submit to another. "Through presumption comes nothing but strife, But with those who receive counsel is wisdom" (Prov. 13:10). ([See discussion of The Mind of Christ](#) - 1 Cor 2:16)

**R. V. G. Tasker** wrote that "peace-makers are those who are at peace with God and who show that they are truly children of God by striving (**Ed**: Enabled by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit) to use every opportunity open to them to effect reconciliation between others who are at variance."

**Martin Luther** - Christ took our sins and the sins of the whole world as well as the Father's wrath on his shoulders, and he has drowned them both in himself so that we are thereby reconciled to God and become completely righteous.

**Aristotle** defined **bitterness** as "the resentful spirit that refuses **reconciliation**."

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**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 Romans 5:9-10 Reconciliation)

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**WORLD'S WAY VERSUS GOD'S WAY OF RECONCILIATION** - "The world's way of dealing with misunderstandings or conflict is to nurse hurt feelings, to spread gossip, and to stand up for your rights. God's way is to go directly to the one who offended and seek to be reconciled. Jesus said that this is so important that even if you are worshiping, leave your worship and first be reconciled to your brother (or sister; Mt. 5:23-24). Recognizing that it is difficult, Paul said (Ro 12:18), "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Pursue peace (Heb 12:14)!"

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**BRING US TOGETHER** - During the 1968 presidential campaign, the town of Deshler, Ohio, became famous. One of the candidates was making a whistle-stop there. A thirteen-year-old girl picked up a sign that someone had dropped and held it up. The sign said, "Bring us together again." The news media coverage made the girl in Deshler, Ohio, famous overnight. "Bring us together again."

That's the cry of hearts today. There is a need for reconciliation, for people to be brought back together. The Bible begins with a record of perfect harmony—heaven and earth working together in joyful cooperation. But then sin enters the picture, and you see division, dissent, death, and separation. Man is separated from God. Man runs from God and hides. And then man is separated from man, brother killing brother. There is a separation of races and nations as Genesis records the awful consequences of sin. The great need is for reconciliation, and that is the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reconciliation means to bring together that which was separated or at war. Reconciliation involves the sinner, the Savior, and the believer....**Rome had two kinds of provinces**—senatorial provinces and imperial provinces. What was the difference? The senatorial provinces were peaceful, and Rome did not put any troops there. The imperial provinces were the warlike provinces where there was trouble. Emperor Augustus ruled those provinces directly through his troops, and he always sent ambassadors to those provinces. The fact that God has chosen Christians to be His ambassadors in this world is an indication that the world is an "imperial province" at war with God. (Warren Wiersbe - Key Words in the Christian Life)

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**RECONCILIATION IS DIFFICULT** - Pr 18:19 says "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a castle." When love is lost, bitterness sets in, and the bitterness is as strong and as intense as the love had previously been. "Pulpit Commentary": "Bitter are the quarrels of friends"; and, "Those who love beyond measure also hate beyond measure." "Clarke": "When brothers fall out, it is with extreme difficulty that they can be reconciled." The verse shows an offended brother is hard to be won, but it does not say it is impossible. Paul and Barnabas had a serious break (Acts 15:36-40), but there is evidence that such was not permanent. Paul refused to take Mark (Acts 15:37,38), which no doubt was an offence to Mark, but later Paul wrote, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is useful to me for ministering" (II Tim. 4:11). Jacob and Esau had a notable falling out (Gen. 27:41-45), but later there was a reconciliation (Gen 33:8-12). This verse gives a strong reason for being careful of what we say and do that may needlessly offend others. Jas. 1:19 says, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." (Donald Hunt - Proverbs Commentary)

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**MAN TO MAN RECONCILIATION - THE STRAIGHT STORY** - [Watch this true story](#) (IT GETS [8/10 STARS!](#)). "The Straight Story" chronicles a trip made by 73-year-old Alvin Straight from Laurens, Iowa, to Mt. Zion, Wis., in 1994 while riding a lawn mower. The man undertook his strange journey to mend his relationship with his ill, estranged, 75-year-old brother Lyle.

**OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONAL - GOING STRAIGHT** - How far would you travel to put things right with a brother who hadn't spoken to you in 10 years? Would you go 300 miles from Iowa to Wisconsin? On a riding lawn mower? Unable to drive a car and despising bus travel, Alvin Straight did exactly that in the intriguing film [The Straight Story \(watch it on youtube\)](#). It is the true-life drama of a 73-year-old man who decided it was time to end the silence, stop the hating, and break down the wall of anger he and his brother had built between them. As I watched the film in a packed theater, where the audience was silent from beginning to end, I thought of all the broken relationships that must have surfaced in the minds of people sitting there in the darkness. I also pondered the words of Jesus about setting things right with those from whom we've been estranged. He said, "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). Is there a relative, a friend, or a brother in Christ with whom you need to make things right? Then why not go straight to that person and do it today?

Lord, let me feel the pain of a wounded soul  
And seek to heal that wounded one I pray;  
Yes, I would take the reconciling role,  
And bring an end to pain and strife today. —Hess

An offense against your neighbor builds a fence between you and God.

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**FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION** - Steven Cole links **forgiveness** and **reconciliation** - Biblical forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling. It is to dismiss the case from court. The word means to let go or release. When you forgive, you choose to let the matter drop and you promise not to bring it up against the person in the future. Biblical forgiveness does not say, "I forgive you but I never want to see your stinking face again!" Biblical forgiveness opens the way to restore wounded relationships. **Reconciliation is the goal of forgiveness**....Former First Lady, Barbara Bush, spoke these words at a college commencement: *As important as your obligation as a doctor, a lawyer, or a business leader will be, you are a human being first, and those human connections with spouses, with children, with friends are the most important investments you will ever make. At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, winning one more verdict, closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a child, a friend or a parent. Our success as a society depends not on what happens in the White House but on what happens inside your house.* (Reader's Digest [1/91], pp. 157-158.) Relationships are important to us. But even more so, they matter to God! That's why Jesus warns so strongly about being on guard against relational sins and emphasizes so strongly the need for rebuke, repentance, and forgiveness. **If you have a strained relationship with a family member, a fellow Christian, or even with**

**a non-Christian, I urge you, so far as it depends on you, to pursue peace and reconciliation.** God will bless you as you seek to obey Him.

**TREE ACROSS THE RAVINE** - Veteran Bible missionary pilot Bob Griffin tells about the difficulty Bible translators had putting the word reconciled into the native Auca language. They searched for an equivalent but found none. Then one day a translator was traveling through the jungle with some of the Auca people. They came to a narrow, deep ravine, and the missionary thought they could go no farther. The Aucas, however, took out their machetes and cut down a large tree so that it fell over the ravine, permitting them all to cross safely. The translator, listening intently to the Aucas, discovered that they had a word for "tree across the ravine." This seemed to be the best way to express the meaning of the word reconciled. The great "ravine" between sinful man and a holy God was bridged by Jesus Christ. He became man, lived a sinless life, and died for us. He reconciled us to God. He is our "tree across the ravine." Christ was delivered for our sins that we might be delivered from our sins. ([Dave Egner](#)).

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**ANGER AND RECONCILIATION** - Anger that flares up because I did not get my way or because someone has offended me, is sinful. Anger that blows up is never proper because it is not under control. We are to be slow to anger (James 1:19) because God is slow to anger (Exod. 34:6). Anger that clams up and does not confront a problem, but just goes into a slow burn, often with hateful or vengeful thoughts, is sinful because it's acting on the basis of self, not for the purpose of seeking truth and **reconciliation**. Proper anger is motivated by the knowledge that sin destroys people. Its motive is restoration of the sinner and reconciliation of the relationship out of the desire for God to be glorified. Thus it attacks the problem, not the person. Thus we have to be careful with anger in relationships. It's easy to cross the line from righteous anger to selfish anger and thus to sin. It's easy to justify selfish anger as righteous, when it's not. But it's also easy to back off from anger and become indifferent: "If he wants to destroy himself, that's his problem! I couldn't care less!" That's also sin, because it's motivated by selfishness. Self-sacrificing love becomes angry, angry enough to confront difficult problems, angry enough to take the initiative for **reconciliation**; but it's careful not to sin. (Steven Cole. If you are in need of some "R&R" [Relational Reconciliation] take a few minutes to prayerfully read Ephesians 4:17-32 and then read through Pastor Cole's full message entitled [Solving Conflicts](#)).

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**IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES** - It happens again and again, all across America. A couple meets. Something "clicks." A romance begins. They fall in love. As they stand at the front of the church pledging their lives to one another, family and friends look on with beaming smiles. Everyone agrees that they are such a perfect couple. But at some point after this idyllic scene, problems hit. The couple begins to discover that they are not as compatible as they had thought. The romance fades. Conflicts grow more intense and frequent. They finally conclude that they are no longer in love and go their separate ways, hoping to find someone the next time around who will be more compatible. I read recently of an actress who ended her 40-day marriage, claiming **irreconcilable differences**! But the problem is rarely a lack of compatibility--no two people are compatible. The problem is not knowing how to solve conflicts God's way, or not being willing to go God's way. Any two people who live together in the closeness of marriage are going to have conflicts--even "spiritual Christians!" A good marriage isn't one where two compatible people never have conflicts; a good marriage is one where two self-willed people have learned to submit to Christ and to work out their differences in Christian love. You will have a satisfying marriage to the degree that you learn to solve your conflicts God's way. You don't need to find a more compatible mate as much as you need to learn how to become a more compatible mate. (Steven Cole)

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**FALSE RECONCILIATION** - It's like when a husband wrongs his wife. To make peace, he brings home some flowers and a gift. That may be a way of waving a white flag, opening the door for peace talks. But if the gift is all that's done, there hasn't been adequate reconciliation. The husband needs to specify how he wronged his wife and ask forgiveness. They need to talk about what happened so that they understand each other. Otherwise, she's going to say to herself, "He thinks he can just run roughshod over me and then bring me a gift to make everything right. But he's not willing to deal with the real problem." (See full message which deals with several points regarding the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau - "[Time to Eat Crow](#)" Ge 33:1-20 by Keith Krell)

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**THE QUILL EFFECT** - Two Porcupines in Northern Canada huddled together to get warm, according to a forest folktale. But their quills pricked each other, so they moved apart. Before long they were shivering, so they sidled close again. Soon both were getting jabbed again. Same story; same ending. They needed each other, but they kept needling each other.—Leslie Flynn, *When the Saints Come Storming In*

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**FORGIVENESS & RECONCILIATION** - Does forgiveness always lead to reconciliation? The answer is no. Forgiveness is one thing; reconciliation is something else. Reconciliation requires forgiveness, but forgiveness does not demand reconciliation. Forgiveness depends on you. Reconciliation depends on you plus the other person. It implies confession, repentance, forgiveness, restoration of trust, and the passage of time plus a mutual desire to reconcile. Often it is not possible; sometimes it is not wise. (Ray Pritchard - [Is Total Forgiveness Realistic?](#)) Pritchard goes on to say "Maybe there is a relationship broken in your life. Well, let me tell you something. **Broken relationships block the Holy Spirit of God.** If we say we believe in reconciliation, then we have to believe in it

more than just a theoretical sense. It has to work down into the deepest areas of life."

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**HUTU & TUTSI RECONCILIATION** - Maggy Barankitse grew up in Burundi, which shares a border with Rwanda. There, [600,000 people were massacred during ethnic violence between Hutus and Tutsis](#). After Maggy witnessed the murder of 72 friends and coworkers in 1993, God gave her the vision for Maison Shalom (House of Peace) where Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa people would build a new community together, reconciled to one another through God's love. Maison Shalom embodies God's deep healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation between enemies. (Today in the Word)

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**PUZZLING PARADOXES** - A man in Ohio asked me a difficult question. He said, "I do not understand the difference in the two testaments. In the Old Testament, God is so terrifyingly holy that He is constantly telling us to keep our distance. In the New Testament, however, He is warm and loving. There He comes close to us. They are opposite pictures to me. Can those two opposites of holiness and love be reconciled?" I told him, "**Calvary reconciles those two opposites. Nothing like the cross of Christ shows us how holy God really is. The appalling and terrible requirements of God's awesome holiness called for nothing less than the cross to make us holy. At the same time, nothing like the sacrifice of Christ shows us how vast God's love is and how far He is willing to go to reach us in His infinite love.**" For two thousand years theologians have struggled with what are apparently two opposite poles (if infinity can have a pole) in God's nature—holiness and love. A closely related polarity consists of the apparent opposites of justice and mercy. Another is that of judgment and grace. On the one side we can group God's holiness, justice, and judgment. On the other side is His love, mercy, and grace. I checked these words in my thesaurus and found that it listed them indiscriminately under such headings as divineness and God. To be God is to be holy and just, according to the thesaurus. Yet the same entries said that to be God is to be love—merciful and forgiving. Jesus' example must somehow reconcile these apparently antithetical qualities, since He is God. When we have the mind of Christ, we will have the same qualities on our human level. ([The Mind of Christ - T W Hunt](#))

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**PREJUDICE AND RECONCILIATION** - In these times, dangerous prejudices for the believer are those of race or ethnic group. Prejudice imperils reconciliation, and God wants all His peoples to be reconciled. Prejudice is not the mind of Christ. Under the supervision of God's Spirit, we may find other unsuspected prejudices. For example, some believers unconsciously think that if God works a certain way in their life, He will work that way with other believers. This is true in the area of spiritual gifts. We sometimes think that the use of our particular gift or gifts is the only way God can work in the lives of others. Some Christian workers think that all are called to their same calling. Men or women may think the other sex is failing when it does not see their perspective. If we are prejudiced about the way God must work in anyone's life, we are limiting the sovereignty of God. If God is sovereign, there can be no prejudice on our part that would limit His working in our lives. Once again, I had to make a list, this time of prejudices. I had not suspected their lurking presence—"peccadilloes," as the world calls them—but they limit the control of God. ([The Mind of Christ - T W Hunt](#))

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**UNSPEAKABLE** - A story is told of two unmarried sisters who had so bitter a ruckus they stopped speaking to each other. Unable or unwilling to separate, the pair lived in a large single room with two beds. A chalk line divided the sleeping area into two halves, separating doorway and fireplace, so that each could come and go and get her own meals without trespassing on her sister's domain. In the black of night each could hear the breathing of the foe. For years they coexisted in spiteful silence. **Neither was willing to take the first step to reconciliation.**—Leslie Flynn, When the Saints Come Storming In --- **Editorial Comment** -- What is the message? It is simple. In reconciliation one of the parties has to be willing to take the first step! This is exactly what God did when He sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins against Him! We had irreconcilable differences with God but He stepped into the world and provided the way of reconciliation through the precious blood of His Son. Amazing grace indeed!

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**BRAWLING BRIDES** - Unthinkable and unnatural though it may seem, the bride has been brawling for centuries. We get along for a little while and then we are back at each other's throats. After a bit we make up, walk in wonderful harmony for a few days, then we turn on one another. We can switch from friend to fiend in a matter of moments. In a "Peanuts" cartoon, Lucy says to Snoopy: "There are times when you really bug me, but I must admit there are also times when I feel like giving you a big hug." Snoopy replies: "That's the way I am ... huggable and buggable."—Robert L. Short, Parables of Peanuts

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**A REAL LIFE ILLUSTRATION OF RECONCILIATION** - Jim Walton was translating the NT for the Muinane people of La Sabana in the jungles of Colombia. But he was having trouble with the word peace. During this time, Fernando, the village chief, was promised a 20-minute plane ride to a location that would have taken him 3 days to travel by walking. The plane was delayed in arriving at La Sabana, so Fernando departed on foot. When the plane finally came, a runner took off to bring Fernando back. But by the time he had returned, the plane had left. Fernando was livid because of the mix-up. He went to Jim and launched into an angry tirade. Fortunately, Walton had taped the chief's diatribe. When he later translated it, he discovered that the chief kept repeating the phrase,



"I don't have one heart." Jim asked other villagers what having "**one heart**" meant, and he found that it was like saying, "There is nothing between you and the other person." That, Walton realized, was just what he needed to translate the word peace. To have peace with God means that there is nothing--no sin, no guilt, no condemnation--that separates us. And that peace with God is possible only through Christ (Ro 5:1-note). Clearly this is also a perfect picture of man reconciled to God. The question is do you have "**one heart**" with God today? Do you have "one heart" with your spouse, your relatives, your co-workers, a former friend (and the list goes on)? Reconciliation rules the soul when Christ rules your heart!

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**AN "ST" ON THE FOREHEAD** - The story is told of two brothers, convicted of stealing sheep, who were branded on the forehead with the letters **ST**, to indicate "sheep thief." One brother couldn't bear the stigma. He became bitter and moved away, never to return. The other brother chose a different course. He said, "I can't run from what I did, so I'll stay here and win back the respect of my neighbors." (**Ed**: Or one could say "I will be reconciled with them!") As the years passed, he built a solid reputation for integrity. One day a stranger saw him, now an old man, with the letters still on his forehead. He asked a townsman what they signified. "It happened a long time ago," said the villager. "I've forgotten the particulars, but I think the letters are an abbreviation for '**saint**'" (from "Our Daily Bread," Aug., 1982). What about your relationships? Are you working at being reconciled to those from whom you are alienated, as much as it depends on you? Have you sought forgiveness and made restitution to those you have wronged? Would those who formerly knew you as a sheep thief now think that the **ST** on your forehead must be an abbreviation for saint?

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Elizabeth Barrett Browning's parents disapproved so strongly of her marriage to Robert that they disowned her. Almost weekly, Elizabeth wrote love letters to her mother and father, asking for a **reconciliation**. They never once replied. After ten years of letter writing, Elizabeth received a huge box in the mail. She opened it. To her dismay and heartbreak, the box contained all of her letters to her parents. **Not one of them had ever been opened!** Today those love letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents opened and read only a few of them, a **reconciliation** might have been effected. **The Bible is God's letter of reconciliation to us. We should open and read it thoroughly and often.**

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**FRACTURED FAMILIES** - A boy once asked his father, "Dad, how do wars begin?" "Well, take the First World War," said his father. "That got started when Germany invaded Belgium." Immediately his wife interrupted, "Tell the boy the truth. It began because somebody was murdered." The husband drew himself up with an air of superiority and snapped back, "Are you answering the question, or am I?" Turning her back on him in a huff, the wife walked out of the room and slammed the door as hard as she could. When the dishes stopped rattling in the cupboard, an uneasy silence followed, broken at length by the son. "Dad, you don't have to tell me any more. I know now!" It is not news that American families are fracturing at an alarming rate. Only 34 percent of all children born in America will live with both biological parents through age eighteen. Seventy percent of African-American babies and 19 percent of white babies in the United States are born out of wedlock. Most will never know their fathers, let alone experience their love (source, James Dobson newsletter, March, 2002). If those statistics were only "out there," it would be alarming enough. But evangelical Christians don't fare much better than the world when it comes to fractured families. At a recent pastors and wives conference that Marla and I attended, the speaker said that he grew up in an evangelical family, but his parents' faith never quite connected with the way that they related to one another in the home. That's tragic, in light of the fact that the second great commandment is to love one another! What good is our faith if it doesn't result in daily loving relationships in our families? (From [Steven Cole's sermon "Reconciled Families" - Malachi 4:4-6](#))

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**HE'S STARTING IT AGAIN!** - Genuine forgiveness runs deep. It is not a thin patch on a relationship; it's a complete change of heart toward the offender. Too often we think we have extended forgiveness when we have only covered over our resentment. Rabbi David A. Nelson tells the story of two brothers who went to their rabbi to settle a longstanding feud. The rabbi got the two to reconcile their differences and shake hands. As they were about to leave, he asked each one to make a wish for the other in honor of the Jewish New Year. The first brother turned to the other and said, "I wish you what you wish me." At that, the second brother threw up his hands and said, "See, Rabbi, he's starting up again!"

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**REAL RECONCILIATION - CLEARING OUT THE ROOTS!** - When our forefathers came to America, the land had to be cleared before it could be cultivated. They soon discovered that cutting down the trees was but a small part of their task. A far more difficult job was clearing out the roots. If they were not removed, the area would soon be covered with a second growth, and the farmers would have to start all over again. Our hearts are like that ground. Every bit of hidden anger and every trace of an unforgiving attitude must be thoroughly rooted out before we can "love one another fervently with a pure heart." (1 Peter 1:22) **When a dispute is only superficially resolved, the arguing may stop, but the resentment and distrust continue. There has been no genuine reconciliation.** We must go beyond an outward truce and show love for others even when we disagree with them. Don't just smooth out quarrels on the surface! Go deeper. Ask God to reveal any hidden bitterness in your heart and to help you forgive the one who has wronged you. ([Henry Bosch](#))

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**FORGIVENESS IS THE KEY THAT OPENS THE DOOR TO RECONCILIATION** - "Esau ran to meet [Jacob], and embraced him." (Ge 33:4) For sixty-one years, piano virtuoso Vladimir Horowitz refused to visit his native Russia. After he fled the country in 1925, he seemingly turned his back forever on his homeland. He declared, "I never want to go back, and I never will." Yet after all those years he changed his mind. Early in 1986, at age eighty-one, Horowitz returned to the Soviet Union and gave a truly remarkable concert. His willingness to rethink his position led to a most memorable musical performance. What Horowitz did when he reversed his longstanding position can be a good example for any of us. If we were wrong or wronged, we must be willing to change our mind (**Ed**: Enabled by the Spirit and the power of the Cross that reconciled us to God). Esau had every reason to be upset with Jacob for stealing his blessing. One translation of Genesis 27:41 says that Esau "held a grudge" against Jacob. In fact, he threatened to kill him. Yet when it came time for the brothers to be reunited, Esau had a change of heart. He swallowed his words and did what was right. Are we willing to do the same? ([J Branon](#))

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**I'M SORRY, MAN** - Be reconciled to your brother. (Matthew 5:24) When my son-in-law Ewing and I attended a sporting event, we enjoyed watching both the game and the people around us. One of those people showed both the bad and good side of humanity. This man had apparently lost track of his seat. As he was looking for it, he stood squarely between us and the field. A man sitting in front of us also had his view blocked, so he told the guy, "Could you move? We can't see." The lost man responded sarcastically, "Too bad." A second request got a similar but more heated response. Finally the man moved on. Later came a surprise. He returned and told the man he had blocked, "Hey, I'm sorry, man. I was upset that I couldn't find my seat." They shook hands and the incident ended well. That interaction made me think. As we go through life striving to find our way, situations may frustrate us and cause us to respond to others in an un-Christlike way. If so, we must ask God to give us the courage to apologize to those we have offended. Our worship, according to Jesus, depends on it (Mt. 5:23-24). We honor God when we make reconciliation with others a priority. After we have been reconciled, we can then fully enjoy communion with our heavenly Father. **Confession of sin is the soil in which forgiveness flourishes.** ([Dave Branon](#))

It's not easy, Lord, to swallow our pride and ask others to forgive us. But You want us to seek reconciliation before worship can take place. Help us to seek forgiveness when necessary.

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**GANG MEMBERS RECONCILED** - History was made during a recent church service at the Ebenezer AME church in Washington D.C. Two warring gang leaders stood in front of the congregation, hugged, bawled, and then signed a truce. The service was also the closing ceremony for the church's Young Men Conference. The momentous occasion was made possible because the church has taken a unique approach to reach their community. Ebenezer Church 's Young Adult Minister Tony Lee and his brother Bill, the youth minister, have followed a unique ministry plan to make a difference in their community. The Lee Brothers have filled Bible lessons with slang and launched a fashion ministry through a church owned clothing line. They even sponsor a Christian club called, "Saturday Night Live" and use hip-hop music and dance moves in their outreach. The brothers say the times call for more radical tactics to reach out to today's youth. Tony says, "It's so easy for churches to get caught up going to the light. There are young people crying out for alternatives." His brother Bill adds, "The church is not the four walls. In order to get young people to church, you've gotta go grab them." The gang truce resulted from an effort by a local anti-crime alliance known as Alliance of Concerned Men who brokered the truce between the two gangs and then turned to the Lee brothers to provide spiritual guidance in the process. They prayed with the gangs' leaders both of whom Bill had known from the community. Tony Lee says the service was meaningful to everyone involved. He said, "If you looked at that congregation, you had weeping adults. Many adults are looking for that ray of hope. For the young men, it gave them a sense of affirmation that their community would support them." He adds, "Anytime there is a ball rolling in the wrong direction, you've got to have a time when you stop and change direction. It's the role of the church to pick up steam and push it." (Washington Post, Brothers Make a Crew into a Congregation)

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**NO WRONG TOO SMALL TO RECONCILE** (Mt 5:23-24) - In May 1946, William Fogarty got a parking ticket in Norfolk, Virginia. Fogarty bought a \$1 money order to pay the ticket, but forgot to send it in. Last month Fogarty was looking through a box of collectibles from his Navy days and found an old wallet containing the money order. Though it was 60 years late, Fogarty wrote a letter to the Norfolk Police Department and included the money order. Norfolk Police Officer Chris Amos said Fogarty's 60-year-old money order wouldn't be cashed. Instead, the department plans to frame it and put it on display in their museum. Officer Amos said, "It's one of those restoring your faith in mankind things." There is no wrong too small to set right, not even a one dollar debt from 60 years ago.

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**RECONCILIATION ACCOMPLISHED WITH ONE DOLLAR** - Years ago a small-town merchant had identical twin boys who were inseparable. They were so close that they even dressed alike. It was said that their extraordinary closeness was the reason they

never married. When their father died, they took over the family business. Their relationship was considered “a model of creative collaboration.” Because he was busy, one of the brothers neglected to ring up a sale and absentmindedly left a dollar bill on top of the cash register while he went to the front of the store to wait on another customer. Remembering the dollar, he returned to deposit it only to find the bill was gone. He asked his brother if he had seen it, but the brother said he had not. An hour later he asked his brother again, but this time with an obvious note of suspicion. His brother became angry and defensive. Every time they tried to discuss the matter, the conflict grew worse, culminating in vicious charges and countercharges. The incredible outcome was the dissolution of their partnership, the installation of a partition down the middle of the store, and two competing businesses. This continued for twenty years—an open, divisive sore in the community. One day a car with an out-of-state license pulled up in front of the stores. A well-dressed man entered one brother’s shop and asked how long the store had been there. Learning it had been twenty years, he said, “Then you are the one with whom I must settle an old score.” *Some twenty years ago I was out of work, drifting from place to place, and I happened to get off a boxcar in your town. I had absolutely no money and had not eaten for three days. As I was walking down the alley behind your store, I looked in and saw a dollar bill on the top of the cash register. Everyone else was in the front of the store. I had been raised in a Christian home and I had never before in all my life stolen anything, but that morning I was so hungry I gave in to the temptation, slipped through the door, and took that dollar bill. That act has weighed on my conscience ever since, and I finally decided that I would never be at peace until I came back and faced up to that old sin and made amends. Would you let me now replace that money and pay you whatever is appropriate for damages?* When the stranger finished his confession, he was amazed to see the old store owner shaking his head in deep sorrow and beginning to weep. Finally the old man gained control and, taking the gentleman by the arm, asked him to go to the store next door and tell its owner the same story. The stranger complied. Only this time two old men who looked almost identical wept side by side. From our distance we cannot say whether the two brothers professed to be believers, or were even churchgoers. Given the time and the culture, they probably owned some religious inclinations. Indeed, they could have been enthusiastic churchmen—even evangelicals. But whatever their spiritual profession, their merciless, unforgiving spirits revealed hearts that had never understood the mercy of God. For if they had, they themselves would have been merciful. (Kent Hughes - Sermon on the Mount)

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**CONFLICT RESOLUTION** - It is possible for two groups to feel equally impassioned about the rightness of their cause and the wrongness of the cause of their opposition, and for both groups to have only one thing in common, the depth of their religious convictions. In his book, "Moral Purity and Persecution in History", Barrington Moore, Jr. writes, "Persecution often arises against a minority religious group that challenges the unchallengeable dogma of the majority. On both sides the issue becomes one of blasphemy. Both sides claim to be advocates of moral purity." The first step for these opposing groups to resolve their conflict is to come to see their opponent as someone for whom Christ died. Then and only then can they find reconciliation (Jim Wilson - 1000 Fresh Illustrations)

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**THE PEACEMAKERS** - Jesus next blessed those who brought harmony into the world: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Mt 5:9-note) Our principle here is **reconciliation**. God wants to see unity with Himself and unity within the body of Christ. **Obtaining unity means seeking reconciliation.**

**The reconcilers will be called sons of God. In reconciling, we are like Jesus and have a family resemblance.**

Some of us resist reconciliation because we fear compromise. Compromise is, in fact, a danger. We cannot compromise doctrine, but some of our fears are really fears of compromising culture. Christ is acultural. His message has found root in radically diverse cultures. We tend to become more attached to our culture than to our doctrines. By culture I mean the way we do things in our Christian life or the way we have church. Without compromising doctrine, I have found it possible to worship and fellowship with many different expressions of the Christian faith. In fact, I have learned much from certain cultures that are radically different from the one in which I grew up. I have taught "The Mind of Christ" several times to multidenominational and multiracial groups with excellent responses from all denominations and races. I have even taught it to denominations and church groups that had doctrines or practiced polity radically different from my own. Yet we enjoyed a blessed fellowship in our common loyalty to Christ. The key to crossing cultures is to maintain the centrality of Christ. So long as His deity, His humanity, His works, and His basic instruction for living are not altered or compromised, we can rally around His person. **In effect, in our multicultural meetings we found peace with one another through our common loyalty to and submission to Christ. This reconciliation, I believe, is the mind of Christ.** He prayed for it (John 17:21, 23). We need not compromise our doctrine to love our brothers or sisters, whoever they are. Jesus reconciled. "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jew and Gentile] into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity... that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:14-18-note) ([The Mind of Christ - T W Hunt](#))

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**FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION** - From her birth, Rosemarie Claussen's life took a terrible turn. The daughter of the Police Chief of Hamburg, Germany was born in August 1934. Adolf Hitler happened to be visiting her hometown that day, and the German Leader became Rosemarie's godfather. Claussen says, "I say that he 'offered', but I don't think my father had any option to say no." Claussen says her father was a believer and loved the Jewish people in the midst of the German persecution. Her father used his position to help Jewish people until he was discovered. He was given the option of dying or having his family taken to a concentration camp. Though Claussen later gave her life to Jesus Christ, she struggled with anger and unforgiveness toward Hitler, the Gestapo, and the Russians. She founded a ministry focusing on reconciliation and unforgiveness in the church, yet Claussen still found bitterness and hatred filling her mind. In 1986, Claussen says God cornered her. She says, "I heard His voice saying that unless I forgave, He could not forgive me, and He could no longer allow me to minister in His name." She says that was the moment that she was able to forgive those who had wronged her in the past and adds, "When I did this, I began to experience a wonderful freedom. It was like somebody had opened a bag where I was imprisoned all of my life and suddenly I began to enjoy the freedom and the deliverance from this shame and from my past. Claussen has helped many others find forgiveness and reconciliation since then. She says, "When I experienced this freedom and reconciliation with God and the love God has given to me; the love He has sent to the world through His Son, I couldn't stop talking about it.

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## Spurgeon's Sermons on Reconciliation

### Romans 5:11 [Joy in a Reconciled God](#) (excerpt)

The present passage indicates a high attainment in spiritual life, when the soul learns not only to **rejoice in salvation** (Ro 5:10)—which is an early experience, or to **rejoice in tribulation** (Ro 5:3)—which is a far riper fruit, but advances even beyond that, and learns to make **her joy, her glory, and her boast IN GOD, IN GOD ALONE. "And not only so, but we joy in God."** There is the point of elevated experience of which the apostle speaks with such confident familiarity. It certainly touches the confines of heaven, if it be not altogether heaven. This is the joy of angels and of spirits purified from all stain; they **joy in God. Yet this is an attainment possible to us here.** I might confine my thoughts to that subject, but it might be for profit if I use the text in another way, embracing that thought and making it the main topic of discourse, but taking a somewhat wider range. **My text seems to me to describe the progress of a soul towards God.** There is the first step visible in it, though somewhat in shadow and rather implied than expressed. The second step is very clear; it is "receiving the atonement," or more correctly "**the reconciliation.**" The third step shines in a yet brighter light; having received the reconciliation, "**we joy in God**" and so we complete our fellowship with Him, and ascend to an elevation which, if it be not in heaven, lies on the confines of it. (Amen, let it be so for every reader of Romans 5 dear Lord. Amen)...**The text declares that we have received the reconciliation;** there was, therefore, a time when we had not received it, and before we could receive it we were made sensible that we needed it; and before we could be conscious of that need we were led to see that from necessity of his nature God must be angry with such sinful creatures as we were. It is the dawn of grace in the soul when the heart perceives that there is a holy God, and that such a God cannot be on terms of amity with an unholy thing like itself. God is not angry with men arbitrarily because he chooses to take a dislike to them. Oh, no. God is necessarily angry with evil, because he is holy, and pure, and good. A being who has no anger against evil has no love towards goodness. This is one mark of righteousness, that it of necessity takes fire, and burns with indignation against unrighteousness. ([Romans 5:11 Joy in a Reconciled God](#))

### 2 Corinthians 5:18 - [The Ministry of Reconciliation](#) (excerpt)

THERE has been a long-standing quarrel between God and man. It commenced in that day when our first parents hearkened to the serpent's voice, and believed the devil rather than their Maker. Yet God is not willing for that quarrel to continue. According to the goodness of his nature, he delights in love. He is the God of peace; and he has, on his part, prepared everything that is needful for a perfect reconciliation. His glorious wisdom has devised a plan whereby, without violating his justice as the Judge of all the earth, and without tarnishing his perfect holiness, he can meet man upon the ground of mercy, and man can again become the friend of God. That blessed work was done long ago; and now, all that remains is that man should be reconciled to God, that he should be willing to end the dispute, and that his heart should turn towards his Maker again in love, and peace, and perfect reconciliation. He bids us, his ministers, and, indeed, all his servants,—each according to his opportunity, and experience, and knowledge, and ability, and grace,—to go abroad amongst the sons of men, and exercise "the ministry of reconciliation,"—to labour to bring men into harmony with God, that they may be willing to accept what God has done toward the making of an everlasting peace, and ending, once for all, this grievous quarrel.

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**WALKING BILLBOARDS** - Pete Peterson's first contact with Vietnam was in the Vietnam War. During a bombing raid in 1966, his plane was shot down and he was taken prisoner. Over 30 years later he returned as US Ambassador to Vietnam. One press article called him "a walking billboard for reconciliation." He realized years ago that God had not saved his life for him to live in anger. Because he believed this, he used the rest of his life and his position to make a difference by pushing for better safety standards for children in Vietnam. It is a great responsibility and honor to be appointed as a representative of your country to another. As followers of Christ we are "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). Just as God sent Christ to reconcile us to Himself (2 Cor 5:18), we now have the ministry of "reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:19). Our message is that all can be redeemed in Christ because God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). In response to the reconciling love Jesus offers us, we can share that love with others. Let's take our role seriously. Wherever God places us in this world, He can use us as walking billboards of reconciliation for Jesus Christ. ([C. P. Hia](#))

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**I WISH YOU JESUS** - War had broken out between my roommate and me. We dealt with our anger by not communicating with each other. I came in one night and found a note from my roommate: "I wish you Jesus." I cried. Then I wrote a note asking her for forgiveness. I placed it on her pillow and went to sleep. Later, my roommate came home and shouted from the hallway that she had left a note on my desk—my sister had called and asked me to send her the music for "I Wish You Jesus"! We both had a good laugh—and were reconciled. —Sue Martinuk, Saskatoon, Sask

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**RACES RECONCILED** - When we are reconciled with God, we are in position to be reconciled with others. There is an important horizontal dimension to reconciliation. People talk a lot about reconciliation between races, between nations, between husbands and wives, or between generations. But the problem with most attempts to bring harmony and peace is that there will be no true and lasting horizontal reconciliation without a proper understanding of vertical reconciliation between man and God. The ancient world had a huge racial divide between Jews and Gentiles. The church at Ephesus felt the impact of this problem, so Paul addressed it in Ephesians 2:11–17. The biblical principle established in this passage is that peace between people must be predicated on what God did for us in Christ. This means that since the world is lacking the basis of true peace we shouldn't be surprised if most peace efforts ultimately fail, whether on the individual or the national level. (Tony Evans)

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**G.I. JOE MODE** - One morning before I left for class, Barbara said, "Why are you wearing that?" I took her comment as an attack and went into my G.I. Joe mode. I counterattacked. I said, "Why are you always criticizing what I put on?" She said, "I'm not always criticizing you." I answered, "Yes you are! You do it all the time." She replied, "I don't do it all the time." We continued to exchange comments with increasing volume. I thought, "Hey, I don't have to put up with this," and remained aloof (for three weeks). Finally I said, "Barbara, I really need to talk with you" She said, "Sure." I explained in detail how I had been offended by her responses to me. Barbara waited patiently until I was finished. Then she said, "Honey, I never said those words that you said I said." Normally Barbara would "give in" first, but it didn't happen this time. So that morning I said, "God, what am I going to do? I believe I'm right..." Then He asked me the question, "Do you want to be right, or do you want to be reconciled?" As much as I hated the question, I knew the answer. —Joseph L. Garlington in *Right or Reconciled? Men of Integrity*,

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**CORRIE TEN BOOM'S EXAMPLE OF FORGIVENESS WITH RECONCILIATION** - Corrie Ten Boom, a precious Dutch was taken captive by the Nazis and put in a concentration camp, along with her sister. The reason Corrie Ten Boom was incarcerated and put in that prison camp at Ravensbrück was because she had been hiding Jews. Corrie's sister died in the concentration camp. When she was in that concentration camp, she was treated with unimaginable brutality. On one occasion she was forced by a prison guard to strip naked and to take a shower while he watched her with his leering eyes and almost raped her with his eyes to the humiliation of this godly young girl. When Corrie Ten Boom got out of prison, she began speaking to groups on the message on forgiveness. And, one of her messages, a man walked up to her put out his hand, and said, "Fraulein, isn't the grace of God wonderful? Isn't forgiveness wonderful?" And, when she looked into that man's face, she froze, because it was that prison guard who had humiliated her. Corrie said, "I froze. I wanted to put out my hand, because I had spoken on forgiveness, but, I couldn't. And, I prayed, 'O Jesus, help me to forgive.'" And, she said, "I put out my hand and put my hand in his hand," and she said, "the grace of God and the love of God began to flow through my body."

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**RECONCILIATION OVER A MOTHER'S DEAD BODY** - A mother in New York, whose son had got into dissipated and abandoned habits, after repeated remonstrances and threats, was turned out of doors by his father, and he left vowing he would never return

unless his father asked him, which the father said would never be. Grief over her son soon laid the mother on her dying-bed; and when her husband asked if there was nothing he could do for her ere she departed this life, she said, "Yes, you can send for my boy." The father was at first unwilling, but at length, seeing her so near her end, he sent for his son. The young man came, and as he entered the sick-room his father turned his back upon him. As the mother was sinking rapidly, the two stood on opposite sides of her bed, all love and sorrow for her, but not exchanging a word with each other. She asked the father to forgive the boy; no, he wouldn't until the son asked it. Turning to him, she begged of him to ask his father's forgiveness; no, his proud heart would not let him take the first step. After repeated attempts she failed; but as she was just expiring, with one last effort she got hold of the father's hand in one hand and her son's in the other, and exerting all her feeble strength, she joined their hands, and, with one last appealing look, she was gone. Over her dead body they were reconciled, but it took the mother's death to bring it about. So, has not God made a great sacrifice that we might be reconciled? even the death of his own dear Son. (D L Moody)

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**BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS** - I watched from my balcony as a 20-story apartment building was demolished. The demolition took barely a week to complete. In its place a new building is being constructed. It's been months now, and despite construction activities going on nights and weekends, it is still incomplete. How much easier it is to tear down than to build up! What is true for demolition and construction of buildings is also true for personal relationships. In Philippians 4:2, Paul wrote to two women in the church, saying, "I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." The quarrel between these two women threatened to tear down the witness of the Philippian church if left unresolved. So Paul urged a "true companion" (v.3) to help rebuild that relationship. Sadly, Christians do quarrel, but we should seek to "live peaceably" with all (Rom. 12:18). Unless our conflicts are resolved, the Christian witness so painstakingly built up can be destroyed. It takes much effort and time to **reconcile** broken relationships. But it is worth it. Like a new building rising from the ruins, **reconciled** believers can emerge stronger. May we seek to build each other up through our words and actions today! ([Our Daily Bread](#))

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**PEACE AND RECONCILIATION** - (Matthew 18:21-35) When the US Civil War ended in 1865, more than half a million soldiers lay dead, the economy was shattered, and people remained deeply divided politically. The observance of Mother's Day in the United States began with two women's efforts for peace and reconciliation during this time of anguish. In 1870, Julia Ward Howe called for an International Mother's Day on which women would unite in opposing war in all its forms. A few years later, Anna Reeves Jarvis began her annual Mother's Friendship Day in an effort to reunite families and neighbors alienated by the war. There is always great suffering when friends and families are fractured and unwilling to forgive. The gospel of Jesus Christ brings the promise of peace and reconciliation with God and with each other. When Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive a brother who sinned against him (Matt. 18:21), the Lord surprised everyone with His answer of "seventy times seven" (Mt 18:22). Then He told an unforgettable story about a servant who had received forgiveness and failed to pass it on (Mt 18:23-35). As God freely forgives us, so He requires that we extend what we have received to others. With God's love and power, forgiveness is always possible. Oh, what joy and peace we forfeit, When forgiveness we withhold; Fellowship with God is broken, And the heart grows hard and cold. —D. De Haan  
Forgiveness is Christianity in action. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

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**Campaign Of Reconciliation** - "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) In Craig Nelson's book *The First Heroes*, we read about the Doolittle Raiders who launched the first major counterattack on the Pacific front during World War II. Not all of the "raiders" returned from their bombing mission. Jacob DeShazer was among those who were captured and held in POW camps under difficult and painful circumstances. DeShazer later returned to Japan after the war, but not to seek revenge. He had received Jesus as his Savior and had come back to Japanese soil carrying the message of Christ. A former warrior who was once on a campaign of war was now on a campaign of reconciliation. DeShazer's mission to Japan mirrors the heart of the Savior, who Himself came on a mission of love and reconciliation. Luke reminds us that when Christ came into the world, it was not merely to be a moral example or a compelling teacher. He came "to seek and to save" the lost (19:10). His love for us found its expression in the cross, and His rescue of us found its realization when He emerged triumphantly from the tomb in resurrected life. In Christ we find forgiveness, and that forgiveness changes our life and our eternity—all because Jesus came on a campaign of reconciliation. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

While Jesus hung on Calvary's cross,  
The devil and his demons smiled;  
Disciples grieved and mourned the loss,  
But God and man were reconciled. —Sper

We can go to others because Jesus came to us.

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**SPURIOUS RECONCILIATION** - One New Year's Eve at London's Garrick Club, British dramatist Frederick Lonsdale was asked by Seymour Hicks to reconcile with a fellow member. The two had quarreled in the past and never restored their friendship. "You must,"

Hicks said to Lonsdale. "It is very unkind to be unfriendly at such a time. Go over now and wish him a happy New Year." So Lonsdale crossed the room and spoke to his enemy. "I wish you a happy New Year," he said, "but only one."

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### Samuel Davies - [Sinners Entreated to Be Reconciled to God](#)

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**Puritan Prayers** - When I am afraid of evils to come, comfort me by showing me that in myself I am a dying, condemned wretch, but in Christ I am **reconciled** and live; that in myself I find insufficiency and no rest, but in Christ there is satisfaction and peace; that in myself I am feeble and unable to do good, but in Christ I have ability to do all things. Though now I have His graces in part, I shall shortly have them perfectly in that state where Thou wilt show Thyself fully **reconciled**, and alone sufficient, efficient, loving me completely, with sin abolished. O Lord, hasten that day.

My guilty fears discourage an approach to thee,  
but I praise thee for the blessed news  
that Jesus reconciles thee to me.

My Father,  
I could never have sought my happiness in thy love,  
unless thou had'st first loved me.  
Thy Spirit has encouraged me by grace to seek thee,  
has made known to me thy reconciliation in Jesus,  
has taught me to believe it,  
has helped me to take thee for my God and portion.

When I am afraid of evils to come, comfort me,  
by showing me  
that in myself I am a dying, condemned wretch,  
but that in Christ I am reconciled, made alive,  
and satisfied;

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### Puritan Prayer from the Valley of Vision

#### RECONCILIATION

Lord God Almighty,  
Thou art beforehand with men  
for thou hast reconciled thyself to the world  
through the cross,  
and dost beseech men to accept reconciliation.  
It is my responsibility to grasp thy overtures of grace,  
for if thou, the offended part, act first  
with the word of appeasement,  
I need not call in question thy willingness to save,  
but must deplore my own foolish maliciousness;  
If I do not come to thee as one who seeks thy favour,  
I live in contempt, anger, malice, self-sufficiency,  
and thou dost call it enmity.  
Thou hast taught me the necessity of a Mediator,  
a Messiah,  
to be embraced in love with all my heart,  
as king to rule me,  
as prophet to guide me,  
as priest to take away my sin and death,  
and this by faith in thy beloved Son  
who teaches me  
not to guide myself,  
not to obey myself,  
not to try to rule and conquer sin,  
but to cleave to the one who will do all for me.

Thou hast made known to me  
that to save me is Christ's work,  
but to cleave to him by faith is my work,  
and with this faith is the necessity of my  
daily repentance  
as a mourning for the sin which Christ  
by grace has removed.

Continue, O God, to teach me  
that faith apprehends Christ's righteousness  
not only for the satisfaction of justice,  
but as unspotted evidence of thy love to me.

Help me to make use of his work of salvation as  
the ground of peace,  
and of thy favour to, and acceptance of me  
the sinner,  
so that I may live always near the cross.

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When one thinks of how Christ forgave you it should make us much more generous with forgiveness.

- God holds back His anger a very long time when we sin against Him. He bears with us a long time, even when we sorely provoke Him.
- God reaches out to bad people to bring forgiveness to them; the habit of man is to not **reconcile** if the offending person is a person of bad character.
- God makes the first move towards us in forgiveness; the habit of man is to only be **reconciled** if the offending party craves forgiveness and makes the first move.
- God forgives often knowing that we will sin again, sometimes in the exact same way. It is the habit of man to forgive only if the offending party solemnly promises to never do the wrong again.
- God's forgiveness is so complete and glorious that He grants adoption to those former offenders. In the habit of man, even when forgiveness is offered, he will not lift again the former offender to a place of high status and partnership.
- God bore all the penalty for the wrong we did against Him. In the habit of man, when he is wronged, he will not forgive unless the offender agrees to bear all the penalty for the wrong done.
- God keeps reaching out to man for **reconciliation** even when man refuses Him again and again. In the habit of man, one will not continue to offer **reconciliation** if it is rejected once.
- God requires no probationary period to receive His forgiveness; in the habit of man, one will not restore an offender without a period of probation.
- God's forgiveness offers complete restoration and honor; in the habit of man, we feel we should be complimented when we merely tolerate those who sin against us.
- Once having forgiven, God puts His trust in us and invites us back to work with Him as co-laborers. In the habit of man, one will not trust someone who has formerly wronged him. (David Guzik)

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**MARIE DE MEDICIS** - Marie de Medicis, the Italian-born wife of King Henri IV of France, became the regent for their son Louis after her husband's death in 1610. In later years her relationship with Louis soured and they lived in a state of ongoing hostility. Marie also felt a deep sense of betrayal when Cardinal Richelieu, whom she had helped in his rise to political power, deserted her and went over to her son's side. While on her deathbed Marie was visited by Fabio Chigi, who was papal nuncio of France. Marie vowed to forgive all of her enemies, including Cardinal Richelieu. "Madam," asked Chigi, "**as a mark of reconciliation**, will you send him the bracelet you wear on your arm?" "No," she replied firmly, "that would be too much." True forgiveness is hard to extend because it demands that people let go of something they value—not a piece of jewelry, but pride, perhaps, as sense of justice, or desire for revenge.

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**GENERAL'S WIDOWS** - The Civil War was carnage. Then Jefferson Davis of the Confederacy died. And Ulysses Grant of the Union died. Their widows, Varina Davis and Julia Grant, settled near each other. They became closest of friends.

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**PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL** - **S Lewis Johnson** illustrates **reconciliation** - When we think of an illustration in the New Testament, one of the illustrations that comes to my mind is the **parable of the forgiving father**, often called the parable of the prodigal son (See Luke 15:11-32). But the important person in the parable is not the son, the important person is the father. That's the way we do, we tend to want to look at things so selfishly that by the time we read one of the Lord's parables we've turned it



around and made it something else. In the parable of the forgiving father, the father with the two sons, one of whom is the prodigal and the other is the one who stayed at home, in that parable, the climax of the parable is when the father sees the son finally returning, and races down the road in order to fall upon his neck. It's Jesus Christ's picture of God. And the picture of the return of the prodigal, who forgives beforehand – who has already forgiven – is the picture of the reconciliation of the Jew to God and the Gentile to God, and of both together to the Lord God. **"That he might reconcile both to one God in one body."** We often think of God as a God Who requires that we do certain things before he will love us. But that is so foolish. The Bible does not present to us a God before whom we must do certain things in order for Him to love us. The Bible presents a God Who has loved us before, and has given the Son as the redeeming sacrifice in order to save His people. Sometimes we sing Wesley's "[Arise my Soul, Arise.](#)" It has a stanza that goes, **"My God is reconciled, his pardoning voice I hear."** ([play](#)) Occasionally, in order to stress the fact that it is not God Who needs reconciliation but man who needs reconciliation – you'll notice the text in verse 16 says "and that he might reconcile both unto God," – we changed the first line of the hymn, **"To God I'm reconciled, his pardoning voice I hear."** I think that's much more harmonious with Scripture. ([Ephesians 2:11-22 Made Nigh by Christ's Blood](#))

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**THE HIGH COST OF REFUSING RECONCILIATION - DAVID'S FAILURE TO RECONCILE WITH ABSALOM** - from David Guzik - The woman of Tekoa applies her story to David and Absalom (2Samuel 14:12–17) The king does not bring his banished one home again: The woman of Tekoa spoke boldly to David, confronting **his sin of not initiating reconciliation** with Absalom. Because he was **estranged** from David and growing more and more **bitter**, Absalom was a **threat** to Israel and David allowed it (Why then have you schemed such a thing against the people of God?). **David had some responsibility to initiate reconciliation.** If David approached Absalom, he might be rejected, but he still had the responsibility to try. Yet as king and chief judge of Israel, he also had a responsibility to both initiate reconciliation and to do it the right way. David will not succeed in this. "He is willing to pardon the meanest of his subjects the murder of a brother at the instance of a poor widow, and he is **not willing to pardon his son Absalom**, whose restoration to favor is the desire of the whole nation." (Clarke) We will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground: **The woman of Tekoa wisely spoke to David about the urgency of reconciliation** "David, we all die and then the opportunity for reconciliation is over. Do it now." But He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him: The woman of Tekoa meant, "Find a way to do it, David. God finds a way to bring us back to Himself." It is true that God finds a way—but not at the expense of justice. God reconciles us by satisfying justice, not by ignoring justice. **This is one of the best Gospel texts in the Old Testament.** If we are under the chastening of God, we may feel like banished ones. Yet we can put our place of being His banished ones, belonging to Him and trusting Him to bring us back to Him. God has devised a way to bring the banished back to Him, that they might not be expelled from Him. The way is through the person and work of Jesus, and how He stood in the place of guilty sinners as He hung on the cross and received the punishment that we deserved.

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**RELATIONSHIP UNDER REPAIR** - "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another." - Ephesians 4:32

- [Are you easy to get along with?](#)
- [Do you have a good relationship with your spouse or your friends?](#)

Then you probably aren't guilty of the following behaviors:

1. criticizing instead of praising
2. using insensitive words
3. neglecting others
4. making jokes at another's expense
5. not listening
6. refusing to admit wrong
7. being rude
8. belittling others' opinions

**These kinds of behavior will wreck relationships and hinder the healing of past hurts. For a good example of the way to strengthen relationships, read the apostle Paul's short letter to Philemon, a wealthy resident of Colosse.** The subject is Onesimus, Philemon's slave, who had stolen from him and fled to Rome. There Onesimus met Paul, who led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus. The letter is Paul's kind, compassionate appeal to Philemon to accept Onesimus back -- now as a brother. It's a great example of love in action. Although Onesimus deserved Philemon's punishment, Paul called him a "son" (Philemon 1:10) and a "beloved brother" (Philemon 1:16). He said he would repay what Onesimus had stolen. **Paul knew how to restore a relationship. Do we?** -- J. David Branon (**Ed:** After you've read and meditated on the short letter of Philemon, here is a link to that can help you crystallize your thoughts - [Philemon Commentaries & Sermons](#))

God of grace and God of goodness,

Teach me to be ever kind,  
Always gentle and forgiving  
With the Savior first in mind.  
- Brandt

Forgiveness is the glue that repairs broken relationships.

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**THE DIVIDING WALL** - (Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:1-3) "He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation." (Ephesians 2:14) November 9, 2010, marked the 21st anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. On that day in 1989, an announcement over East German TV informed people that they were free to travel to West Germany. A day later, East German bulldozers began to dismantle the wall that for 28 years had divided East and West Germany. Jesus Christ "has broken down the middle wall of separation" between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). But there was an even more impenetrable barrier that separated man from God. Jesus' death and resurrection made the reconciliation between man and man and between man and God possible (Eph 2:16). All believers are now "members of the household of God" (v.19). Together, we are to grow into "a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21) with God's Holy Spirit living among and within us (Eph 2:22). But sadly, Christians often re-erect walls between one another. That is why Paul urges us to "walk worthy of the calling . . . , bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:1-3). Rather than building walls, let's work to dismantle what separates us. Let the world see that we are indeed of the same household. We're members of Christ's body, A blessed family; So let's not fight or quarrel, But live in harmony. —Fitzhugh Unity among believers comes from their union with Christ. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Jesus! whose blood so freely stream'd  
To satisfy the law's demand;  
By Thee from guilt and wrath redeem'd,  
Before the Father's face I stand.

To reconcile offending man,  
Make Justice drop her angry rod;  
What creature could have form'd the plan,  
Or who fulfill it but a God?  
-- William Cowper

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**MAKE PEACE** - (2 Corinthians 5:17-20) "God . . . has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18) It was a dramatic story of forgiveness. In December of 2000, on the Battleship Missouri Memorial, a dozen American survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbor embraced three of the Japanese pilots who had flown attacking planes. **The reconciliation ceremony** had been arranged by the American-Japan Friendship Committee. That moving scene is only a dim reflection of what God's grace does for us. Although we are sinful, we can be brought into a relationship with God through simple faith in Jesus. Because He died on the cross in our place, God blots out the record of our sins and makes us right with Him. The Lord in His amazing love has not only forgiven us but has also given to us "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). We have the honor of sharing the good news with others so that they too can be at peace with God. And when we are right with God, we are also to do what we can to live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18). Have you accepted God's offer of forgiveness in Christ? Are you telling others about His love? And are you an agent of God's grace in your relationships? Start today—make peace. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

God has a purpose and plan for your life  
When from your sin He has given release;  
You're an ambassador for Jesus Christ—  
Go and tell others of His perfect peace. —Hess

When we experience peace with God, we can share His peace with others.

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**HEAVEN'S GIFT** - Shortly after the turn of the century, Japan invaded, conquered, and occupied Korea. Of all of their oppressors, Japan was the most ruthless. They overwhelmed the Koreans with a brutality that would sicken the strongest of stomachs. Their crimes against women and children were inhuman. Many Koreans live today with the physical and emotional scars from the Japanese occupation. One group singled out for concentrated oppression was the Christians. When the Japanese army overpowered Korea one of the first things they did was board up the evangelical churches and eject most foreign missionaries. It has always fascinated me how people fail to learn from history. Conquering nations have consistently felt that shutting up churches would shut down Christianity. It didn't work in Rome when the church was established, and it hasn't worked since. Yet somehow the Japanese thought they would have a different success record. The conquerors started by refusing to allow churches to meet and

jailing many of the key Christian spokesmen. The oppression intensified as the Japanese military increased its profile in the South Pacific. The “Land of the Rising Sun” spread its influence through a reign of savage brutality. Anguish filled the hearts of the oppressed and kindled hatred deep in their souls. One pastor persistently entreated his local Japanese police chief for permission to meet for services. His nagging was finally accommodated, and the police chief offered to unlock his church...for one meeting. It didn't take long for word to travel. Committed Christians starving for an opportunity for unhindered worship quickly made their plans. Long before dawn on that promised Sunday, Korean families throughout a wide area made their way to the church. They passed the staring eyes of their Japanese captors, but nothing was going to steal their joy. As they closed the doors behind them they shut out the cares of oppression and shut in a burning spirit anxious to glorify their Lord. The Korean church has always had a reputation as a singing church. Their voices of praise could not be concealed inside the little wooden frame sanctuary. Song after song rang through the open windows into the bright Sunday morning. For a handful of peasants listening nearby, the last two songs this congregation sang seemed suspended in time. It was during a stanza of “Nearer My God to Thee” that the Japanese police chief waiting outside gave the orders. The people toward the back of the church could hear them when they barricaded the doors, but no one realized that they had doused the church with kerosene until they smelled the smoke. The dried wooden skin of the small church quickly ignited. Fumes filled the structure as tongues of flame began to lick the baseboard on the interior walls. There was an immediate rush for the windows. But momentary hope recoiled in horror as the men climbing out the windows came crashing back in—their bodies ripped by a hail of bullets. The good pastor knew it was the end. With a calm that comes from confidence, he led his congregation in a hymn whose words served as a fitting farewell to earth and a loving salutation to heaven. The first few words were all the prompting the terrified worshipers needed. With smoke burning their eyes, they instantly joined as one to sing their hope and leave their legacy. Their song became a serenade to the horrified and helpless witnesses outside. Their words also tugged at the hearts of the cruel men who oversaw this flaming execution of the innocent.

Alas! and did my Savior bleed?  
did my Sovereign die?  
Would he devote that sacred head  
for such a worm as I?

Just before the roof collapsed they sang the last verse, their words an eternal testimony to their faith.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay  
the debt of love I owe:  
Here, Lord, I give myself away  
'Tis all that I can do!  
At the cross, at the cross  
Where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away —  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day.

The strains of music and wails of children were lost in a roar of flames. The elements that once formed bone and flesh mixed with the smoke and dissipated into the air. The bodies that once housed life fused with the charred rubble of a building that once housed a church. But the souls who left singing finished their chorus in the throne room of God. Clearing the incinerated remains was the easy part. Erasing the hate would take decades. For some of the relatives of the victims, this carnage was too much. Evil had stooped to a new low, and there seemed to be no way to curb their bitter loathing of the Japanese. In the decades that followed, that bitterness was passed on to a new generation. The Japanese, although conquered, remained a hated enemy. The monument the Koreans built at the location of the fire not only memorialized the people who died, but stood as a mute reminder of their pain. Inner rest? How could rest coexist with a bitterness deep as marrow in the bones? Suffering, of course, is a part of life. People hurt people. Almost all of us have experienced it at some time. Maybe you felt it when you came home to find that your spouse had abandoned you, or when your integrity was destroyed by a series of well-timed lies, or when your company was bled dry by a partner. It kills you inside. Bitterness clamps down on your soul like iron shackles. The Korean people who found it too hard to forgive could not enjoy the “peace that passes all understanding.” Hatred choked their joy. It wasn't until 1972 that any hope came. A group of Japanese pastors traveling through Korea came upon the memorial. When they read the details of the tragedy and the names of the spiritual brothers and sisters who had perished, they were overcome with shame. Their country had sinned, and even though none of them were personally involved (some were not even born at the time of the tragedy), they still felt a national guilt that could not be excused. They returned to Japan committed to right a wrong. There was an immediate outpouring of love from their fellow believers. They raised ten million yen (\$25,000). The money was transferred through proper channels and a beautiful white church building was erected on the site of the tragedy. When the dedication service for the new building was held, a delegation from Japan joined the relatives and special guests. Although their generosity was acknowledged and their attempts at making peace appreciated, the memories were still there. Hatred preserves pain. It keeps the wounds open and the hurts fresh. The Koreans'

bitterness had festered for decades. Christian brothers or not, these Japanese were descendants of a ruthless enemy. The speeches were made, the details of the tragedy recalled, and the names of the dead honored. It was time to bring the service to a close. Someone in charge of the agenda thought it would be appropriate to conclude with the same two songs that were sung the day the church was burned. The song leader began the words to "Nearer My God to Thee." But something remarkable happened as the voices mingled on the familiar melody. As the memories of the past mixed with the truth of the song, resistance started to melt. The inspiration that gave hope to a doomed collection of churchgoers in a past generation gave hope once more. The song leader closed the service with the hymn "At the Cross." The normally stoic Japanese could not contain themselves. The tears that began to fill their eyes during the song suddenly gushed from deep inside. They turned to their Korean spiritual relatives and begged them to forgive. The guarded, callused hearts of the Koreans were not quick to surrender. But the love of the Japanese believers—unintimidated by decades of hatred—tore at the Koreans' emotions.

At the cross,  
At the cross,  
Where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away...

One Korean turned toward a Japanese brother. Then another. And then the floodgates holding back a wave of emotion let go. The Koreans met their new Japanese friends in the middle. They clung to each other and wept. Japanese tears of repentance and Korean tears of forgiveness intermingled to bathe the site of an old nightmare. Heaven had sent the gift of reconciliation to a little white church in Korea. ( Little House on the Freeway, Tim Kimmel as quoted in Bible.org)

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**Pastor Ray Stedman** wrote that the **Ministry of Reconciliation . . .**

- Originates with God, not man
- Is personally experienced
- Is universally inclusive
- Is without condemnation
- Is delivered by men
- Is owned and accredited by God
- Is voluntarily accepted
- Achieves what otherwise is impossible
- Is experienced moment by moment

Here is Pastor Stedman's full message on the ministry of reconciliation

***The ministry of reconciliation originates with God.*** "All this is from God," says Paul. The offended One, God Himself, initiates the way of reconciliation. We, the offenders, only respond.

The good news does not originate with man; it is not simply another way man has invented to find his own way back to God. The very nature of the good news is such that it couldn't have been invented by man. It begins by postulating nothing in man except weakness, failure, and rebellion. By that one stroke, all competition is eliminated in the quest for salvation. No one can properly think of himself as any closer to God than other people--apart from Christ. Those who pride themselves on their moral and respectable lives are no closer to God than the murderer or the sex pervert, for in reality, pride of respectability is just as much a manifestation of alienation from God as murder or debauchery.

This element of the good news irritates and offends many people. Those who count on their good works to save them are put off by this proclamation. They want God to take them on their terms. However, their offense is only further confirmation of the apostle's claim that "all this is from God." No flagrant sinner would dare dream he has some way to stand before God; no self-righteous person would imagine he needed anything to make himself acceptable. The good news of reconciliation could never originate with man. It comes wholly from God.

***The ministry of reconciliation is personally experienced.*** The Christian who witnesses to the new covenant does not speak academically. He is able to identify fully with the hurt and darkness of those to whom he speaks, for he has (as the saying goes) "been there, done that" himself. But he has found something else, something so satisfying and complete as to make him eager to share it with others. He doesn't speak of "the plan of salvation" as though it were all theological doctrine, requiring only an intellectual grasp in order to receive it. Rather, he gives witness of a personal Lord who is at once the Savior and sustainer of his life. He does not convey the impression that when he surrendered to this Lord he was immediately and completely delivered from all struggle with evil, guilt, hate, and fear, but he makes it clear that the initial surrender

produced a permanent change at the center of his being. And power continually flows from that center to enable him to conquer--gradually, successively, day by day, step by step--the areas of his life yet dominated by evil and failure. He freely acknowledges his present failures but rejoices in the certainty that they too shall succumb to the authority and power of a resurrected Lord. "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

***The ministry of reconciliation is universally inclusive.*** "[God] gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ." One of the wonders of true Christianity is its universality. Though the church was originally Jewish, it was quickly embraced by the Gentiles. Christianity spread from the Holy Land into Europe and Africa, to Asia and the Americas. It has proven to satisfy the spiritual hunger of people from every culture and ethnic background, from every class--rich, poor, and in-between. Jesus is worshiped in the penthouses and in the ghettos, by those of the political right, left, and center. Men find that the message of Jesus speaks to their need as men, and women find that the message of Jesus fulfills and completes their femininity. It brings the wholeness of God to the whole need of every person--physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

The silly idea has arisen somehow that Jesus and God the Father have different and opposing personalities. According to this idea, Jesus is tender and compassionate toward lost mankind, and stands protectively between us and a vengeful, angry God the Father. Paul disposes of this faulty concept forever with his clear statement, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ." It was the Father who initiated the work of redemption. He gave His only Son, sending Him into the world to bring about our redemption and reconciliation through cruel death and subsequent resurrection. It was the Father who "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

So it is the Father *and* the Son who, by means of the Spirit, reach out to a hurting, lonely world and offer pardon, peace, and joy to all who will come. No one is excluded by virtue of race, color, condition, or class. The door is wide open to all.

***The ministry of reconciliation is without condemnation.*** "Not counting men's sins against them." Because of the cross of Jesus, the problem which human evil raises before God is totally eliminated. God does not require anything but the honest acknowledgment of evil to eliminate its degrading, destructive results in human experience. No penance is demanded, nor will any be accepted. No self-chastisement is required. Any attempt to resort to these is but proof that the individual has not believed what God has plainly said. This is not only true when a person first comes to Christ, but it remains true throughout his entire life.

The penalty of death for any or all of my sins has already been fully borne by Christ--and that means death in all its varied forms. I only bear my sins in my experience when I refuse to believe God and seek in some way to justify them before God. But the experience of death ends the moment I believe Him: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

This is the element that especially makes reconciliation such good news. All God ever requires of us is that we acknowledge our evil and be willing to be delivered from its power. The actual work of deliverance is accomplished by God for us on the basis of the death of Jesus. The cross has *already* set us free; it is only waiting for us to believe it in order to make it real in our experience.

Of course, certain natural consequences of our evil will still remain in our experience. Sin always leaves its scars. The person who repents from a lifestyle of sexual sin and turns to Christ will be forgiven--but forgiveness doesn't erase the natural consequences of that lifestyle, such as broken relationships, emotional scars, or sexually transmitted diseases. The person who repents from a life of criminal behavior and turns to Christ will be forgiven--but forgiveness doesn't erase the possibility of punishment for those crimes and the need to make restitution. The consequences of old sins, even though forgiven, often remain. But those sins can no longer produce spiritual death in us, because the resurrection life of Jesus now pulsates within us. The mistakes and rebellions of our past will be turned into instruments of grace to mellow and soften us and make us clearer and brighter manifestations of God's redeeming love.

We should never hesitate to return to God when we sin. He is already fully aware of our sin. In fact, He expects us to fail, because He knows us better than we know ourselves. Like the loving father of the prodigal son, He is not ashamed of us, nor does He reject us. He waits for our return, and when we do, He welcomes us with a father's kiss and with open arms.

An innocent man was once on trial for his life in a court of law. After the evidence was presented by both the prosecution and the defense, the prosecuting attorney rose to give his summation to the jury. He spoke at

great length and with persuasive eloquence, citing all the evidence against the accused man. When the prosecutor had concluded his speech, the innocent man leaned over to his own attorney and whispered, "He was very convincing. For a while there, he even had me believing I was guilty!"

Satan is much like that prosecutor. He accuses us, making us feel guilty even after our sins have been completely washed away by the sacrifice of Jesus, even after God has pronounced us innocent because of the cross. As Christians, forgiven by God, we may at times experience shame, we may feel unworthy--but those emotions come from our accuser, Satan. They do not come from God. Our loving heavenly Father has already forgiven us and waits only for us to acknowledge our sin and thank him for the restored relationship that is already ours through Jesus Christ.

***The ministry of reconciliation is personally delivered.*** "And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." The good news does not come by means of angels. It is not announced from heaven by loud, impersonal voices. It doesn't even come by poring over dusty volumes from the past. In each generation it is delivered by living, breathing men and women who speak from their own experience. Incarnation, the word become flesh, is forever God's way of truly communicating with people. It comes always at the cost of hunger and thirst, personal hardship borne for Christ's sake--blood, sweat, and tears.

Some today have claimed to come to Christ apart from the aid of others, having read the good news in the Scriptures without the aid of teachers. But they have forgotten the labors and hardships endured by those who have given them the Scriptures in their own language, often at the cost of their lives. No one who reads the Bible in English should ever forget that Tyndale, Wycliffe, and Coverdale, the early translators, were all bitterly persecuted men who labored at the risk of their own lives.

It is easily demonstrable today that only a few Christians are able to read the Scriptures and grow by direct obedience to the precepts stated there. The rest of us seem to require models and mentors to follow. Only a few have the gift of faith, daring to challenge the accepted norms and traditions in the church which violate God's Word. But when those few lead out and exemplify in their lives the blessing that comes from obedience to the Scriptures, others are able to follow. Love and faith must somehow become visible, embodied in human lives, before they can be caught and emulated by others. "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). There is a strong personal element about the gospel which cannot be eliminated without diminishing and harming its effect.

***The ministry of reconciliation is authoritatively accredited.*** "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Ambassadors are the official spokesmen of a sovereign power in a foreign state. Their word is backed up by the power that sent them out--but only when the word of the ambassador truly represents the mind and will of the sending state. So Christians everywhere are authorized spokesmen for God, "God making his appeal through us," but only when they are living authentically as Christians. Whenever that is true, God honors their word by making visible and realistic changes in the lives of those who respond to their witness. It is the mark of undeniable reality which we saw in Chapter 2.

In John 20:22-23 the risen Lord Jesus gave his apostles (and us, through them) the authority to declare the forgiveness of sins or the retention of sins, depending upon the response of listeners to the message of the gospel. To those who believe and accept, we may authoritatively declare, "Your sins are forgiven." To those who disbelieve, we have authority to say, "Your sins are yet retained."

This is part of that "priesthood of every believer" which Scripture teaches so clearly but which has been opposed by much of the institutional church through the centuries. Martin Luther recovered the truth briefly during the Reformation, but it was soon lost to sight again. Yet nothing is more encouraging to a servant of Christ than to see the Lord honoring his ministry by radical and permanent changes made in the lives of those whose lives he touches.

***The ministry of reconciliation is voluntarily accepted.*** "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Throughout this passage the apostle uses words which underscore the noncoercive nature of the gospel: "appeal," "beseech," "entreat." Since, as he says, we make our appeal "on behalf of Christ" or, literally, "in place of Christ," it is important that we be no more coercive than Jesus was when He ministered in the flesh on earth. In fact, authentic Christianity is Christ, by the Spirit, speaking through us today. It cannot be otherwise and still be of the Spirit. There is a remarkable absence of pressure in the presentations which Jesus made to people. He offers himself repeatedly to them. He invites them to respond.

He warns them of the consequences if they refuse. But he does not harangue them or use emotional stories to sway them. When they seem reluctant to respond, He neither prolongs the occasion nor makes the invitation easier. In fact, He is forever sending men away and thinning the ranks of His disciples.

As we have already noted, the proper approach to the servant of Christ is by the open statement of truth to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Appeal is made to the will to respond, and if it does not do so, the matter is left with God to work further in His will and time. This is true not only for the evangelist, but also for the pastor-teacher or anyone who imparts the truth of the new covenant. "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still," says a wise old adage. Truth must find a willing response from the heart or it is of no value. Contrived responses are a waste of time.

***The ministry of reconciliation achieves the impossible.*** "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Here is the supreme glory of the new covenant. It actually achieves what could never be achieved by fallen man: righteousness (worth) before a holy God! It seems impossible even for God. How can a God of justice justify the unjust? How can a righteous God righteously declare a sinner to be righteous? It is a puzzle that staggers the angels. But it was achieved! He who knew no sin, Jesus the Righteous One, was made (on the cross) to be sin on behalf of us, who knew no righteousness, in order that the righteousness of God might be forever *ours!*

Righteousness is not only our unchanging *standing* before a holy God; it is also our present state whenever we are walking in the Spirit. The cross, therefore, is forever the ground of Satan's defeat. It was the ace up God's sleeve which Satan could not have anticipated. The great accuser can never find any ground by which he can turn a righteous God against us, for all our evil was forever cut off from us in the cross, and we now have a totally new identity. We are one spirit with Jesus himself. "But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17). No wonder Paul shouts in Romans 8:31: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" The inevitable outcome of righteousness is freedom. The righteous man is at rest; all his internal tensions and problems are solved. He is not anxious about himself but is free to give his attention to others. That is the glory of the new covenant. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

***The ministry of reconciliation is experienced moment-by-moment.*** The opening verses of 2 Corinthians 6 continue the apostle's argument: "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

It is possible to accept the grace of God in vain. That is, it is possible to live much of life in dependence on the resources of the flesh rather than on the power and riches of the Spirit. Then, of course, for such moments or hours or days Christ has profited us nothing. We have Him, but we live as though He were not there. The grace and power of God are ours, but they do us no good.

Since we must take God's grace by faith (or dependence) and it comes to us moment-by-moment, then it is the present moment we must be concerned with. "I tell you, *now* is the time of God's favor, *now* is the day of salvation." The fact that we walked in the Spirit a few moments ago is of no value to us now; the intention we have to walk in the Spirit in just a few more minutes does not redeem the present. If we choose to act in the flesh *now*, it is wasted time, gone forever, never to be retraced or regained. Let us run the race of life seeking to live each moment in the power and grace of the Spirit of Christ, for any time spent in the flesh is time in which we have accepted the grace of God in vain.

This, then, is the ministry of reconciliation which has been entrusted to us by God. He does not send us forth alone, but goes with us Himself to be both the Author and the Finisher of our faith. Perhaps it would help to summarize:

The Ministry of Reconciliation . . .  
Originates with God, not man;  
Is personally experienced;  
Is universally inclusive;  
Is without condemnation;  
Is delivered by men;  
Is owned and accredited by God;  
Is voluntarily accepted;  
Achieves what otherwise is impossible; and  
Is experienced moment-by-moment.

What a powerful and challenging opportunity His great ministry affords us! The apostle Paul is can't help being caught up with the glory and wonder of it as he writes. He now closes this section of his letter dealing with the new covenant by relating his own experience of the ministry of reconciliation. He does so with incredible power and intense beauty. In doing so, he presents the story of his own life as Exhibit A.

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## June Hunt - Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation?

No. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness focuses on the offense, whereas reconciliation focuses on the relationship. Forgiveness requires no relationship. However, reconciliation requires a relationship in which two people, in agreement, are walking together toward the same goal. The Bible says,

“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3)

- Forgiveness can take place with only one person.
  - **Reconciliation requires at least two persons.**
- Forgiveness is directed one-way.
  - **Reconciliation is reciprocal ... occurring two-ways.**
- Forgiveness is a decision to release the offender.
  - **Reconciliation is the effort to rejoin the offender.**
- Forgiveness involves a change in thinking about the offender.
  - **Reconciliation involves a change in behavior by the offender.**
- Forgiveness is a free gift to the one who has broken trust.
  - **Reconciliation is a restored relationship based on restored trust.**
- Forgiveness is extended even if it is never, ever earned.
  - **Reconciliation is offered to the offender because it has been earned.**
- Forgiveness is unconditional, regardless of a lack of repentance.
  - **Reconciliation is conditional based on repentance.**

QUESTION: “After we forgive someone, must we also try to be reconciled?”

ANSWER: The answer to this question is sometimes yes and sometimes no.

- Most of the time God's desire for us is reconciliation. Second Corinthians 5:18 says, “God ... reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”
- However, sometimes encouraging the restoration of a relationship is not at all wise, as with a partner in adultery or with a rapist. First Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’ ” For instance, if a husband's anger is out of control and he refuses to get help for his violent temper, the wife needs to take this Scripture to heart and move out of harm's way until counseling and lasting changes are a part of his lifestyle.

“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered.”(Proverbs 22:24)

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## Forgiveness: Plan A and Plan B by Robert Morgan

### Plan A: The Forgiveness of Reconciliation:

When the Offending Person is Contrite We Can Practice Forgiveness that Heals our Relationships

Plan A is the ideal. This is the forgiveness of reconciliation: when the offending person is contrite, when we can practice forgiveness that heals our relationships. It's the way we would always choose if it were left to us. This kind of forgiveness happens when someone comes to us with sincerity and says, “I am sorry,” and we can say, “I forgive you.” There is a reconciliation that takes place. It may take time for wounds to heal or for trust to be reestablished or for things to become normal again; but in time the relationship can be stronger even than it was before. This is what happened in the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. The boy broke his father's heart, squandered his money, and lived a reckless life. But he came to his senses, returned home, repented, confessed, and his father embraced him with reconciling forgiveness.

In my mind, the greatest example of this in the Bible is the story of Joseph and his brothers. They deliberately ruined his life. When



he was seventeen years old, his own brothers sold him into bondage; and Joseph spent thirteen years in slavery and in prison. But many years later, the brothers were overwhelmed with guilt and the story of how they gradually came to a place of confession and restoration is told in Genesis. The climax of the story is in Genesis 50:15-21:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father."

In other words, the brothers said, "Joseph, we know you could get even with us and you have every right to do so. But before he died, our father told us word for word what we should say to you, and we are saying it now with earnest sincerity. Please forgive us our sins and the wrongs we committed when we treated you so badly. Please forgive us."

Old Jacob had taught his sons how to ask for Joseph's forgiveness, and they did exactly as he taught them. The story goes on:

When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." So he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

This is Plan A. We see it with the Prodigal Son; we see it with the sons of Jacob. This kind of forgiveness is like spraying the garden of your heart with "Weed-Be-Gone." It keeps us healthy.

### Plan B: The Forgiveness of Release:

When the Offending Person is Unrepentant or Unavailable We Can Practice Forgiveness that Heals our Hearts

But forgiveness also has a Plan B. What do we do when the offending person is unrepentant? What happens if they want to keep on hurting us? Or what happens if they are unavailable? Perhaps they're dead. Maybe someone abused you long ago, and you can never be reconciled to them because they are dead or far away or totally unconcerned. Well, we can still practice forgiveness, but it's a different kind of forgiveness. It's not the forgiveness of reconciliation; it's the forgiveness of release. We release them into God's hands. We release the bitterness. We release the entire situation into the hands of our heavenly Father and let Him deal with it as He sees fit.

This kind of forgiveness is expressed to God in prayer rather than directly to the other person. I'll give you three examples in the Bible.

Luke 23:32-34: Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals—one on His right, the other on His left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

I don't know if you have never noticed this before, but in this passage Jesus forgave His enemies but He did not say to them, "I forgive you." He did not speak to them at all. Instead He spoke to the Heavenly Father in prayer and turned the men over to Him. He was not reconciled with those who crucified Him. There was no fellowship that was restored. He was not condoning their actions. He wasn't absolving them of their guilt. But He was telling God, in effect, "I am not going to harbor anger toward them; they don't even know what they are doing. I'm going to turn them over to You, and My hope is that You will lead them to repentance and forgiveness."

Acts 7:59-60: While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

That is, he died from the injuries they had inflicted on him. He forgave them, but it wasn't **Plan A forgiveness**. **There was no reconciliation**. There was no fellowship between them. Stephen was not condoning or excusing their actions. He was not absolving them of guilt. But he was saying, in effect, "Heavenly Father, I am not going to die in a state of hatred or anger. I'm going to release all my bitterness to you and place these men in Your hands and trust You to handle them. And my hope and prayer is that You will, in Your timing, bring them to a point of repentance and true spiritual forgiveness. And we know that prayer was answered in at least one case, for one of the persecutors, Saul of Tarsus, was later converted and became the apostle Paul.

Now, speaking of Paul, let me give you another passage. Look at 2 Timothy 4:14-16.

Here Paul is dealing with a couple of issues. The first is Alexander the Coppersmith. 2 Ti 4:14 says:

Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed my message.

Here was a man who had deliberately and repeatedly hurt Paul very deeply. He had done him a great deal of harm. But Paul didn't display any trace of pent-up anger or bitterness. He simply said, "The Lord will take care of it. The Lord will repay him. I don't have time to waste on any roots of bitterness." And then in the next verse, he said:

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.

He was on trial for his life in a Roman courtroom, and his friends all stayed away. The Roman Christians deserted him out of fear. But Paul simply said, "May it not be held against them." In other words, his prayer was, "Lord, bring them to a point of repentance and of greater courage. I'm not going to let this make me angry, bitter, or frustrated." Now, it may have taken Paul awhile to come to the point of praying that prayer and adopting that attitude, but he was determined to do it.

### **This is Plan B forgiveness.**

This is what Jesus was talking about when He said in Matthew 5:

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

He was not telling us we had to practice reconciliation forgiveness, because that isn't possible without contrition on the part of the wrongdoer. But he was telling us to practice releasing forgiveness—when we release the person into God's hands with the hope He will bring them to repentance.

This is also what Romans 12 is all about:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This kind of forgiveness does not mean:

- We are absolving the person of blame before God
- We are absolving the person of the natural consequences of their actions
- We are minimizing what happened to us
- We are reconciled to that person
- We can trust the other person again

It means we are turning the damage over to God, releasing the offender to the Lord, depending on God to make things right, trusting His judgment; and furthermore we are willing and even hopeful that in the process, He will bring that other person into a state of repentance, salvation, and eternal life.

All this is based on the truth that God has forgiven us through Jesus Christ. The ultimate act of forgiveness was when Jesus died on the cross to bear our sins; and the Bible says He will abundantly pardon. And if He forgives us our sins, should we not also forgive one another? With Plan A forgiveness when we can; otherwise with Plan B. For the Bible says:

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

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**H A Ironside** tells a story that relates to reconciliation - Playing Big Bear - My eldest son taught me a lesson along this line when he was just a little fellow. There was nothing he liked to play more than bear. First, we had to put some chairs in one corner of the room, with an opening between them. That was the bear's den. Then I had to get down on all

fours, with a big shaggy overcoat over me and be the bear. The little fellow would walk past the den, trying to look as if he had no idea that a bear was anywhere near, when suddenly the savage beast would take after him, and we would run through one room and into another. The little fellow was pretty fleet on his feet, but, of course, he would always be caught at last.

The last time we ever played bear, he had run right into the corner of the kitchen, but the corner didn't open. He had his face right in the corner, and was so excited, that he just screamed. Suddenly, you know, the bear was about to spring, when the little fellow wheeled right about face, caught his breath, and said, "I am not a bit afraid. You are not a bear; you are just my own dear papa," and

he jumped right into my arms.

I got to my feet, held the little fellow close to me, and tried to quiet him. I said to myself as I walked up and down with him, "Blessed GOD, it was just like this with me once. I was running away from Thee. I was afraid of Thee. I thought you wanted to destroy me. I tried to find a hiding place from Thee, but Thou didst never give me up."

I remembered the time years before when GOD ran me into a corner, and I couldn't get away; and instead of trying to run, I turned to Him in repentance, in confession, and said, "I am not afraid of Thee. Thou art not my enemy. I throw myself into Thy loving arms. Thou art my refuge. In Thy tender care and loving mercy, I find a hiding place."

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee;  
Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Save me from its guilt and power.

"Not the labor of my hands  
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow.  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Have you come to Him like that? Have you realized something of your own helplessness? Have you realized your own sinfulness, the utter hopelessness of your ever making atonement for your own guilt? Have you turned to Him as David, and said, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." Then you have a right to add, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." He says, "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found."

Sometimes people put prayer in the wrong place. They have an idea that it is necessary to come to GOD and plead with Him, and pray to Him to put away their sins, and save them in His mercy. Dear friends, Scripture turns things just the other way. Paul says, "As though GOD did beseech you by us, **we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to GOD.**"

I can remember the night I was converted. I can recall, though I was just fourteen, kneeling in my own room in the presence of GOD. I began to beseech Him to look upon me in grace, and save my soul. Then I thought, "What is it that I am asking GOD to do? I am asking Him to do something that He has been offering to do for years, but I have been refusing to permit Him to do it. I am asking Him to give me something - salvation, eternal life - which He has been offering me for years past, and yet here I come pleading for it. Why not simply accept His salvation and thank Him?"

I remember the words that came home to my soul, "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of GOD." Kneeling there I said to Him, "Blessed GOD, I do believe in Thy Son. I trust Him now as my Saviour, and Thou hast told me, 'He that believeth on him is not condemned.'" I knew then and there that He had saved me in His infinite love and kindness. I knew something of the meaning of David's expression, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

If you are thinking seriously of these things, but do not know that your sins are forgiven, are covered, or that your soul is saved, let me say to you, just look up by faith to the Lord JESUS CHRIST, and He will save you right now. "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

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### [Tony Evans](#) - RECONCILIATION: THE RELATIONSHIP OF SALVATION

Reconciliation is another great transaction that took place when we were saved by the grace of God. Reconciliation has to do with the removal of hostility and the restoration of harmony in a relationship. It means that the wall separating the hostile parties has been broken down; the breach between them has been healed.

God took the initiative to reach out to sinners through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. One of the things that Christ's death provided for us was the healing of the broken relationship between God and mankind that occurred in the garden when Adam sinned. As we will see, we have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son.

#### THE NECESSITY OF RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is that work of God made possible through the death of Christ, by which sinners are brought from hostility toward God

into a state of spiritual fellowship and harmony with Him. It is a movement from alienation to restoration.

#### Sin Alienated Us from God

The alienation that Adam's sin created in his relationship with God is evident in what happened immediately afterward. Whereas Adam and Eve had enjoyed intimate fellowship with God in Eden, they hid from the Lord after they sinned because they knew something was wrong (see Genesis 3:8–10). They had become alienated from God.

In Romans 5, the apostle Paul described our alienation as spiritual helplessness, a total inability to rectify the problem of our separation from God. Paul began this chapter by discussing what God has done to provide our great salvation, and then he proceeded to describe our situation that makes this salvation so great. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (v. 6). To be helpless means you can't do anything about your situation. To be ungodly means to be totally unlike God. We lacked any resources or merit to win His favor or overcome the barrier of hostility that sin had built between us and Him. More than that, "we were yet sinners" (Romans 5:8). We stood guilty before a holy God, and that's not the end of the bad news. Paul said we were also God's "enemies" (v. 10), a term that graphically points out our need for reconciliation.

#### God Reached Out to Meet Our Need

It was when we were helpless, ungodly sinners and enemies of God that "we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10).

Reconciliation is God's work and His initiative all the way. Christ's death brought our sin account into balance, so to speak, so that we no longer owe a debt of sin we can't pay. We talk about reconciling our bank statement with our checkbook to make sure the two figures agree and we aren't bouncing checks all over the place. The damage of an unreconciled bank account is obvious, as is the damage of an unreconciled relationship in which there has been broken fellowship.

#### THE DIMENSIONS OF RECONCILIATION

God's work of reconciliation is so complete that it reaches to every corner of creation and touches every relationship you will ever have. There are at least three crucial relationships that were restored when God reconciled the world to Himself.

#### **Our Relationship with God Is Restored**

We've established the fact that reconciliation involves a change in our relationship with God, which is where all true reconciliation begins. Paul gave this truth its classic statement when he wrote, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:18). From God's standpoint, the chasm that separates sinful mankind from Him has been bridged by the cross. The only issue now is whether people will put their faith in Christ and be reconciled to God. That's why we are charged with the task of inviting sinners to be reconciled to God. The results of this are awesome. Christ's death canceled the sin and rebellion of Adam. This means that the sin that was the original cause of our alienation from God has been removed—so that what God is upset about now, if I can use this term, is the fact that people refuse to believe and accept the message of reconciliation.

#### **Our Relationship with Others Is Restored**

When we are reconciled with God, we are in position to be reconciled with others. There is an important horizontal dimension to reconciliation. People talk a lot about reconciliation between races, between nations, between husbands and wives, or between generations. But the problem with most attempts to bring harmony and peace is that there will be no true and lasting horizontal reconciliation without a proper understanding of vertical reconciliation between man and God. The ancient world had a huge racial divide between Jews and Gentiles. The church at Ephesus felt the impact of this problem, so Paul addressed it in Ephesians 2:11–17.

The biblical principle established in this passage is that peace between people must be predicated on what God did for us in Christ. This means that since the world is lacking the basis of true peace we shouldn't be surprised if most peace efforts ultimately fail, whether on the individual or the national level.

#### **Our Relationship with Creation Is Restored**

Reconciliation also has a cosmic dimension. That is, the salvation Christ purchased at Calvary has implications for all of creation. Sin was so devastating that it not only ruptured mankind's relationship to God; sin also marred the whole universe's relationship to God. Adam lived in a perfect Paradise until he sinned, and then all of a sudden the ground began producing thorns and thistles. Life became a struggle to survive in a sometimes harsh and hostile environment. When God created the universe, He pronounced every part of it good, but sin threw the entire world out of order. Creation feels the alienation of sin and is waiting anxiously for the day of redemption (see Romans 8:19). Paul went on to say that the world is waiting in hope for the time when "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Ro 8:21). That's in the future, but for the present the reality is that "the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (Romans 8:22). Creation is groaning from the burden of sin and the alienation it brought between God and His creation. Every time an earthquake occurs, we are witnessing the restless groaning of creation. Hurricanes are a result of creation groaning for the day when it will be

reconciled with God. Nature is aching to be delivered from its bondage to the corruption of sin. Who and what is going to reconcile nature once and for all? The answer is in Colossians 1:15–20, one of the greatest passages in Scripture about the deity and the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection have the power to reconcile the entire creation to God. Jesus has this power because “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created.... He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15–17). Jesus Christ was the active agent in the original creation, and the only thing keeping the molecules of this universe from flying apart is His eternal power. Therefore, His death and resurrection could not help but affect the creation.

Let’s read on in Colossians 1, because it gets even better: He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness [of deity] to dwell in Him, and through Him to **reconcile all things to Himself**, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Colossians 1:18–20)

That’s as complete a statement of the extent of Christ’s reconciliation as you will read anywhere in Scripture. How many things did Christ reconcile to God? All things. Now let’s put this great truth to work. If everything in the universe is held together by Jesus Christ, then that includes your life. So if your life is coming apart at the seams, if the stars and planets of your universe are flying out of their orbits, if your financial or marital or family world is spinning in chaos, then the cosmic reconciliation Christ accomplished on the cross has something to say to you. You may be wondering, If Jesus Christ has reconciled all of creation to Himself, why isn’t the universe reconciled today? Why is there still chaos in nature? Because as we read in Romans 8, nature won’t be fully reconciled until Christ returns and the universe bows before Him as the One who has first place in everything. The universe has not yet recognized the “first placeness” of Jesus Christ. But the Bible says that Christ’s “first placeness” also includes the church. That’s you and me. The natural world may not yet have Christ in His rightful place, but there’s no reason that He should not be enthroned as Number One in our hearts.

It’s only as He is first in everything that you enjoy the fullness of the reconciliation He has paid for. If you’re tired of the thorns and thistles that are choking your spiritual growth and the earthquakes and hurricanes that are throwing you around and splitting your world apart, put Christ back in the place He deserves, which is “first place in everything.”

## THE BLESSING OF RECONCILIATION

We’re getting a great picture of all that God has done to reconcile us. Let me summarize quickly the truths we have covered, not only in this chapter but in the previous chapters as we have been learning what it means to be totally saved. The death of Christ gave God the legal grounds to declare us justified, freed from the charges that were posted against us. At the same time, we were redeemed or bought back from the slave market of sin by Christ’s precious shed blood, which also propitiated God’s wrath against sin so completely that He was free to reach out and end our rebellion and hostility against Him by reconciling us. Our justification provided propitiation, which made possible reconciliation. Every aspect of the doctrine of reconciliation is a blessing, but there is one particular blessing or benefit that I don’t want you to miss. It may be less obvious on a casual reading of Scripture, but it is powerful and important nonetheless.

### We Are Saved by Christ’s Life

For this we need to go back to Romans 5:10, especially the last phrase of the verse. After explaining all that Christ did in His death to reconcile us while we were His enemies and helpless to help ourselves, Paul added, “We shall be saved by His life.” This definitely broadens our understanding of salvation. We were reconciled to God by Christ’s death, but Christ is now alive and sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven (see Hebrews 1:3). There He is serving as our “great high priest who has passed through the heavens” (Hebrews 4:14), and He “always lives to make intercession for [us]” (Hebrews 7:25). In other words, the idea behind Romans 5:10 is that if you put your trust in Christ’s death to save you, now that He’s risen from the dead you haven’t seen anything yet. If Christ can save you and reconcile you to God by His blood, wait until you see what He has in store for you now that He is alive forevermore. If He can take you from hell to heaven by dying, what more can He do for you by rising from the dead? If He can forgive you for all your sins and deliver you from judgment by His death, imagine the power that is at work on your behalf now that He lives!

### Jesus Christ Is Our “Umpire”

The suffering patriarch Job made a very interesting statement as he was being harassed by his accusers. “For He [God] is not a man as I am that I may answer Him, that we may go to court together. There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both” (Job 9:32–33). Job knew that he was in no position to plead his case before God because God was so high and transcendent and he was merely a man. Job said he needed an “umpire,” someone who could listen impartially to both God and him and make a ruling. But Job wound up disappointed because he knew of no one who could fill this role. The umpire whom Job wished for would have had to understand Job so well that he could accurately represent him before God, and yet be as great as God Himself in order to accurately represent God. The umpire Job longed for, a mediator who could stand between us and God and represent each side perfectly, became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He is God Himself, yet He also knows the human

condition intimately because He took on human flesh and experienced everything we have experienced. Jesus Christ can reach out to God because He is God, and He can reach out to us because He is a man. Jesus brings the two together, explaining to the Father what we are experiencing, and explaining the otherwise invisible and unreachable God to us. And Christ is doing this now and every day as our High Priest who is alive forever! He is our Umpire, bringing God and man together.

## THE DUTY OF RECONCILIATION

The Bible's teaching on reconciliation is exciting stuff, but, as always, we are called to do something more with the truth than merely sit on it and keep the good news to ourselves. The God who has reconciled the whole world to Himself has called us to be His ambassadors, taking this message to every corner of the earth.

### We Are God's Mouthpieces

Our charge is found in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20. Paul began by saying that God “gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2Cor 5:18), which is the message that God has taken the initiative to end our hostility toward Him by charging our sins to Christ and making peace with us through His blood. Therefore, since God has “committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2Cor 5:19), our duty is clear. “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2Cor 5:20). The duty of reconciliation is that we speak to others on God's behalf, telling them that they don't have to be alienated from Him any longer. An ambassador speaks for another, and we are to speak as if God were speaking through us. We have the great duty and delight of telling sinners that in Christ God's anger has been appeased, and that if they will come to Him, the war will be over and they will find peace. We can say to sinners, “God told me to tell you that if you will believe in His Son, you will be safe from His judgment.” What a great message for people who are at war with God!

### Restoring What Has Been Disrupted

Reconciliation implies that something has been disrupted and divided, and it needs to be brought back together. Satan is the great alienator and the great divider. His only agenda is to tear families and marriages and churches and individuals apart so that they and others will fail to see God's power of reconciliation. Jesus is the great Reconciler who wants to bring things together. But in order to accomplish His work of reconciliation in our lives, He must be at the center. God has written the world a letter telling people of His love for them and His desire to have them reconciled to Him. It's our duty to open this letter, the Word of God, and help lost people understand how far God has gone to bring them back to Himself. Otherwise, if the message of His letter never gets through to those who need it the most, there will be no reconciliation. Let's make sure we are fulfilling our duty as ambassadors who have a great message to tell.

### PERSONAL APPLICATION FOR LIFE

1. God's work of reconciliation means we can enjoy a harmonious relationship with God. He took the initiative to reach out to us—as sinners—and heal the broken relationship that separated us from Him. Take an inventory of the relationships that touch your life—friends, family, coworkers, other believers in the body. Ask God to give you the strength to take the initiative in restoring any broken relationships.
2. Are you going through a difficult time right now? Did you know that Jesus not only intercedes on your behalf, He also interprets your situations and specific needs to God? He knows what you are going through (Hebrews 4:15). Take your need to God in prayer, confident that He will work on your behalf and resolve things in ways that will bring glory to Himself.
3. The Good News of Christ's sacrifice on the cross should never become “old” news in the life of the believer. Second Corinthians 5:19 tells us we are “ambassadors for Christ.” Make a list of those contacts we talked about above—friends, family, coworkers—and be Christ's ambassador to them. You might be the only witness for Christ those people have.
4. Is your life coming apart at the seams? Colossians 1:15–17 teaches that Jesus, through His power, holds all “all things” together, that is, all of creation. “All things” includes your life. If He can control the incredible forces of the universe, He can certainly work with you to control the chaos in your life. If something else taking first place in your life, start giving God first place. Let Him restore your life and bring it back into order. (From [Tony Evan's book which is a recommended resource - Theology You Can Count On](#)).

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**William J Woodruff** - Reconciliation comes from the Greek family of words that has its roots in *allasso* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Reconciliation has to do with the relationships between God and man or man and man. God reconciles the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18). Reconciliation takes place through the cross of Christ or the death of Christ. Second Corinthians 5:18 says that “God reconciled us to Himself through Christ.” God reconciles us to Himself through the death of his Son (Romans 5:10). Thus, we are no longer enemies, ungodly, sinners, or powerless. Instead, the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom he has given to us (Romans 5:5). It is a change in the total state of our lives.

Reconciliation is the **objective** work of God through Christ ( 2 Corinthians 5:19 ). But it is also **asubjective** relationship: "Be reconciled to God" ( 2 Corinthians 5:20 ). Thus, it is Christ through the cross who has made reconciliation possible, for "God made him to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21 ).

**Reconciliation is also related to justification.** God has reconciled the world, not counting people's sins against them. It is related to justification in Romans 5 . We have been justified through faith (Ro 5:1) by his blood (Ro 5:9).

Reconciliation is also **subjective** in that the sinner is spoken of as being reconciled. It is a relationship that comes between man and wife as well as Jew and Gentile. If a person is about to offer a gift at the altar and remembers that he has something against his brother he should leave his gift and be reconciled first to his brother and then come and offer his gift. **Reconciliation** is something done by the one who offers it; it is not just something that happens to the estranged people. It is the cross of Christ that reconciles both Jew and Gentile. They are brought near by the blood of Christ. Because of this, Jew and Gentile have access to the Father by one spirit. They are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God and members of the same household (Ephesians 2:11-22 ). Gentile and Jewish believers are reconciled to God and the middle wall of partition is broken down; both are brought near by the blood of Christ. They are all built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the Chief Cornerstone. This is made possible by the cross of Christ, but only appropriated when we make the cross and the death of Christ applicable to our life or our relationships.

**This message of reconciliation or salvation** that has come from God through Christ has been passed on to us. "God gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18 ); "he has committed to us the message of **reconciliation**" (v. 19). The ultimate aim is that we are not only justified, but that we might become the righteousness of God (v. 21).

The whole message of reconciliation is centered around the love of God and the death of Christ. Paul reminds us that "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This brings peace with God, access to God through Christ, rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, making us rejoice in suffering, and having the love of God poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:1-5 ). We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Romans 5:11 ). ([Baker Evangelical Dictionary](#))

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Pastor Steven Cole has a sermon on Ephesians 2:14-18 entitled "**Reconciled Relationships**" and in this Biblical teaching he explains that **the foundation of reconciliation between men** (e.g., between husbands and wives who are at enmity) is based on our **reconciliation to God**. If you are struggling with or know someone who is struggling with a relationship that is at enmity, ponder what God has done for you which might just be the [nidus](#) to motivate you to seek reconciliation with that one with whom you are currently at enmity. If a holy God has provided a way for His enemies who literally hated Him to be reconciled, how can we refuse reconciliation to another human being.

#### Reconciled Relationships

Two stories in the Bible evoke strong feelings in me every time I read them. One is the story of Joseph and his brothers. The other is Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. The reason that these stories often cause tears to well up in my eyes is that they are stories of reconciled relationships.

When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, treats them kindly, and forgives them for the terrible thing that they had done in selling him into slavery, it is a moving testimony to the power of reconciled relationships. Later, when their father has died, the brothers fear that Joseph would inflict revenge that he had been withholding. But Joseph wept and treated them kindly because he recognized God's sovereign purpose in what had happened.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the young man impudently rejected the love of his father and chose instead the company of his fast-living, fickle friends. The father's broken heart longed for the return of his wayward son. When he finally saw him coming in the distance, the father felt compassion for him, ran to him, embraced him, kissed him, and joyously welcomed him back into the family. That powerful story shows the tremendous joy both of reconciled human relationships and also of sinners being reconciled to the heavenly Father.

God created us to have close, personal relationships with Him and with one another. Jesus said that the greatest commandment in the Law is to love God with our entire being. The second greatest is that we should love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). Those are both relational commandments. But when sin entered the human race, it alienated Adam and Eve from God and from one another. They tried to hide from the presence of God and then Adam blamed God and Eve for his own sin (Gen. 3:8, 12). Sin always causes alienation towards God and between people.

And so the great problem of the human race is, how can we be reconciled to a holy God from whom we are estranged because of our sin and rebellion? And, how can we be reconciled to one another? We need peace between nations in this war-torn world. We

need peace in our communities. We need peace in our churches, which are supposed to be models of Christ's love, but often are marked by division and strife. And, we need peace in our immediate and extended families. But, how?

Paul addresses this vital subject in our text. The logical way to deal with the topic would be to start with reconciliation with God and then go on to reconciliation on the human level. Being at peace with God is the foundation for peace with others.

But Paul begins here with peace between formerly alienated people (Eph 2:14-15) and then goes to the underlying cause of this reconciliation, namely, reconciliation between those groups and God (Eph 2:16-18). Perhaps his heart was burdened with the very real danger of the Jewish and Gentile wings of the church splitting into factions. So he begins with the problem at hand and then goes deeper to the foundational reconciliation with God that results in reconciliation between formerly hostile groups. He is saying,

Through the cross, Christ reconciled us all to one another and to God.

It's easy to discern Paul's theme here. He uses the word "peace" four times (Eph 2:14, 15, 17 [twice]). He talks about Christ making the two groups into one, breaking down the wall between them, and creating the two into one new man. He mentions twice that Christ removed the enmity and that He reconciled the two groups into one body, so that they both have common access to the Father through the one Spirit. Reconciliation is his theme.

### **1. Through the cross, Christ reconciled us all to one another (Eph 2:14-15).**

Paul has just rehearsed the sad plight of the Gentiles before Christ (Eph 2:11-12). They were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. While the Jews were God's chosen people because of His grace alone, not because of anything meritorious in them, they had become proud and had developed an intense hatred for the Gentiles. They viewed them as uncircumcised dogs. They shook the dust off their feet after traveling in Gentile territory before coming back to the Holy Land, so as not to defile the land. They would never eat with a Gentile. Even Gentile converts to Judaism had to keep their distance in the temple.

We cannot begin to understand the radical nature of what Paul proclaims here unless we keep in mind this centuries-long hostility that had existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. We might compare it to the divide between whites and blacks in the South in our country, or to the conflict between the Shiite and Sunni Muslims in the Middle East. Paul is making the radical assertion that Christ has erased these centuries of racial hatred. So it is vital for the local church to display the peace of Christ in order to glorify Him before a world that only knows strife and conflict. Note three things from these verses:

#### **A. Apart from the cross, there is deep alienation between those from different backgrounds.**

The source of the hostility between the Jews and Gentiles was sinful pride. Pride is at the heart of all racism and all sin. Satan appealed to the pride of Adam and Eve by tempting them to think that they knew better than God what was good for them. Cain proudly thought that his sacrifice to God was better than his brother's sacrifice. When God rejected Cain's sacrifice, he grew angry and murdered his brother. His root sin was pride.

Paul pictured the alienation between the Jews and Gentiles in his day as "the barrier of the dividing wall." He was probably referring to a four-foot wall in the temple precincts that divided the Court of the Gentiles from where the rest of the Jews could worship. On this wall were inscriptions that have been discovered by archaeologists, which warn that if a Gentile goes beyond the barrier, he will have himself to blame for his death which follows. If Paul was writing to the Ephesians from his imprisonment in Rome, they probably would have known about this barrier, even if they had never visited Jerusalem, because the incident that had led to Paul's imprisonment involved one of their men. Paul was in the temple when a mob falsely accused him of bringing Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile, beyond the barrier (Acts 21:27-36). This led to a riot, which led to Paul's imprisonment. This barrier in the temple symbolized the deep hostilities between the Jews and the Gentiles. At the root of those hostilities was religious and ethnic pride on the part of the Jews.

Pride and selfishness account for everything from wars between nations to conflicts in our families. Rulers want greater power and more territory because it feeds their pride. Husbands and wives argue and fight because each one wants his or her way and is not willing to consider the other's point of view. Children rebel against their parents because they want their way. Selfish pride is at the root of most of the anger that divides families.

The greater the social and cultural differences between people, the more likely it is that conflict will increase. Because men and women are different, we are prone to conflict in our marriages. Teenagers think that their parents don't understand the younger generation. People from one nationality have difficulty understanding those from other nationalities. The rich think that the poor are lazy and the poor think that the rich are greedy. So it goes!

At the heart of all of these conflicts is sin. But the world re-fuses to acknowledge this. For example, many in our country say that if we had just used diplomacy with the Muslim extremists, we could have avoided war. But they grossly underestimate the sin



problem. Invariably, pacifists make the mistake of thinking that people are basically good (not basically evil) and if we just treat them nicely and sit down and talk, they will be nice to us in return. Neville Chamberlain made that mistake with Hitler. He thought that he had negotiated “peace in our times,” but he ignored Hitler’s pride and evil intent.

I’m not suggesting that we should be quick to go to war, but I am saying that if we try to negotiate, we had better keep in mind the fact that all people are selfish, proud sinners. To underestimate the sinfulness of the human heart only leads to disaster later. There cannot be any lasting peace among sinners apart from the radical solution of the cross. As John MacArthur put it (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians [Moody Press], p. 76), “Peace comes only when self dies, and the only place self truly dies is at the foot of Calvary.”

## **B. Christ Himself is the only source of peace between those who have been hostile towards one another.**

“For He Himself is our peace...” (Eph 2:14). Christ not only made peace, but He is our peace. Peace can be found only in one place, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, because He alone can deal with our inherent sin problem. When He saves us, we are “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). If you are in Christ and I am in Christ, then He Himself becomes the source of peace between us. We have to view any and all conflict through the lens of the person of Christ.

The fact that Christ is our peace does not mean that peace happens automatically, even between sincere, godly believers. The Corinthian church was rife with conflicts and divisions. Two faithful women in the Philippian church had some sort of conflict, which Paul was concerned about (Phil. 4:2-3). Even Paul and Barnabas had a sharp dispute that led them to part ways in their missionary endeavors (Acts 15:36-40). Paul seemed to realize that sometimes peace is not fully attainable when he wrote (Rom.12:18), “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men.” He says (Rom. 14:19), “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” The Bible says that we must “seek peace and pursue it” (1Pet. 3:11).

So even though we are prone toward conflict, even with other believers, the way toward peace is to have Christ reigning as Lord in each heart. To the extent that He is truly Lord of your life and my life, we will experience peace between us, because He does not fight with Himself. One of the marks of true conversion is when those who formerly were deeply hostile towards one another begin to pursue peace with one another. At the source of this new peace is that Christ has come to dwell in each heart, subduing our selfishness and pride. Paul explains how Christ established this new peace between the Jews and Gentiles:

## **C. Christ established peace through the cross by abolishing the old covenant law and by creating one new man, the church.**

### **(1) Christ established peace through the cross by abolishing the old covenant law.**

I prefer the marginal reading of the NASB (Eph. 2:14-15), “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, the enmity, by abolishing in His flesh the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace.”

Jesus Christ broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, which created enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles. He further explains that the source of this enmity was “the Law of commandments contained in ordinances.” The word “abolished” means “nullified” or “rendered inoperative.” “In His flesh” refers to Christ’s death on the cross. Paul goes on to say (2:16) that through the cross, Christ put to death the enmity.

In my opinion, the relationship between the Law and the believer is one of the most difficult subjects in the Bible, and I can only be brief! As I understand it, Paul is saying here what he else-where states (Rom. 10:4), that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” God ordained the Law for Israel to demonstrate the impossibility of sinners earning standing before God through law-keeping (Gal. 3:19-24). The law shut up everyone under sin. God’s holy law created a barrier between sinners and God.

But the law also created a barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles. The law was given exclusively to Israel as God’s covenant people. Many stipulations in the law excluded Gentiles from the Jewish forms of worship. The priests alone could perform the sacrifices and ceremonies. Only Jews who had properly gone through the cleansing rituals could approach the altar with their sacrifices. So the law created a barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Through the cross, Christ fulfilled and thereby nullified or abolished the old covenant law (this harmonizes Eph. 2:15 with Matt. 5:17-19). He instituted the new covenant in His blood, which puts His holy law into the hearts of believers (Heb. 8:6-13). So, as Paul writes, because Christ bore the curse of the law on the cross (Gal. 3:14), “in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” So through the cross, Christ established the basis for peace between sinners and the holy God and peace between the Jews and the Gentiles. In Christ, “There is neither Jew nor

Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Also,

## **(2) Christ established peace through the cross by creating the one new man, the church.**

The Greek word translated "make" (NASB, 2:15) is literally, "create." What Adam and Eve lost through sin in the original creation, Christ is recovering through the new man, the church, which is His new creation. F. F. Bruce points out (The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians [Eerdmans], pp. 295-296), "Whereas Jews formerly tended to speak of the division of humanity into Jews and Gentiles, Paul makes a threefold classification into Jews, Greeks (Gentiles), and church of God (1 Cor. 10:32), the last embracing former Jews and Gentiles." Thus the church is a new humanity or new race.

The practical implication of this is that there is no basis for dividing the church along racial lines, unless there is a language barrier that keeps us from worshiping together. By being multi-racial and multi-cultural, the church should demonstrate to the world this one new man, which Christ created through the cross.

Thus Paul's first point is that through the cross, Christ reconciled us all to one another. Christ Himself is our peace. Also,

## **2. Through the cross, Christ reconciled us all to God (Eph 2:16-18).**

Paul makes three points here, which I can only touch on:

### **A. Through the cross, Christ reconciled us in one body to God, having put to death the enmity of the law (Eph 2:16).**

This overlaps what he said in verse 15, but the focus shifts from our reconciliation to one another to our reconciliation with God. Through the cross, Christ brought Jews and Gentiles into one body, the one new man. Now He reconciles this one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. The law condemned Jew and Gentile alike, because it clearly proves that we all have sinned against God. Jesus Christ perfectly kept God's law, not only externally, but also on the heart level. The Father testified of Jesus (Matt. 3:17), "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." Because Jesus satisfied God's righteous demands, through His death that paid our penalty, God offers complete reconciliation and peace to everyone who trusts in Jesus. As Paul puts it (Rom. 5:1), "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." So the basis for being reconciled to God is not anything that you do, but only by trusting in what Jesus did for you on the cross.

### **B. Through the cross, Christ preached peace both to pagans and to the religious (Eph 2:17).**

In verse 17, Paul paraphrases Isaiah 57:19, "And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near." By "you who were far away," Paul means, the Gentiles. They were the strangers to the covenants of the promise (Eph. 2:12). But Christ also preached peace to those who were near, the Jews. Probably Paul is referring not only to Jesus' earthly ministry, but also to His preaching the gospel through the apostles and others in the early church, who, beginning with Peter, preached to the Gentiles (Acts 10; 11:20).

But the point of Eph 2:17 is, it is not only the pagan Gentiles who need to hear the good news of peace with God through the blood of Christ. Religious people (the Jews), those who know about the covenants of God's promise of salvation, also need to hear the good news. Religious observance, even of the strictest kind, cannot save anyone. Paul chronicles his own religious credentials (Phil. 3:5-6), "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." But, keep reading (3:7), "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." He goes on to emphasize that he did not stand before God in a righteousness of his own derived from the Law, but rather through the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (3:9).

This means that if you are counting on getting into heaven because of your religion or your good deeds, you will not succeed. Peace with God comes only through the cross of Jesus Christ. He paid the debt in full for all that believe in Him!

### **C. Through the cross, we all have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph 2:18).**

Eph 2:18 is deliberately trinitarian, because the Trinity demonstrates perfectly the harmony and unity that we are to strive for in the church. While the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we cannot completely explain or understand, the Bible is clear that the one God exists in three eternal persons, each of whom is fully God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They each are distinct persons and yet they are not three gods, but one God. The one God has enjoyed perfect fellowship and love between the three persons from eternity.

Here Paul says (Eph 2:18), "through Him [Christ], we both [Jew and Gentile] have our access in one Spirit to the Father." At the heart of the gospel is that we now have access to God, whom Paul here calls, "the Father." This means that Christianity is not a religion of rituals. It is a personal relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

"Access" means "introduction," much as a common person would be introduced to the king through the king's representative. If you

know the White House chief of staff, he can gain you access to the President. Jesus Christ gains us access to the God of the universe, who is a Father to us because of the cross! What an indescribable privilege, to be able to come into the presence of the Father, through the Son, in dependence on the Holy Spirit! Whether Jew or Gentile, the way into God's presence is the same: it is through the cross of Christ.

Conclusion

There are two obvious applications of these verses.

**First, and foremost, do you have a personal relationship with the Father because you have trusted in the blood of His Son Jesus to cover all of your sins?**

The only way to know peace and reconciliation with the holy God is to be justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). Good works won't gain access to the holy God. Religious rituals won't reconcile you to Him. Only the cross, where Jesus reconciled sinners with God, gains access into heaven. Make sure your trust is in Christ alone!

**Second, are you pursuing peace with your fellow believers?**

This includes members of your family. It includes people in this church. Perhaps they are a part of another church. If they have been reconciled to God through faith in Christ and you have too, then you must do all that you can to be reconciled to them. The testimony of the cross before a strife-torn world depends on it.

**Application Questions**

1. If Christ is our peace, why couldn't two godly men, like Paul and Barnabas, get along in the ministry?
2. Because Christian unity is such a big deal, is it sinful to form various denominations?
3. How can we work to restore demonstrable unity among genuine believers?
4. Reconciliation with God must be the basis of reconciliation among believers. What implications does this have for Christian unity?

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Pastor Cole addresses how it is possible to experience reconciliation of relationships in his exposition of the the story of Joseph and his estranged brothers.

Genesis 45:1-15

The Key To Reconciliation

Whenever I go to the airport, I enjoy watching when passengers get off an arriving flight. I don't know anything about the people or their relationships, except what I see there, but it's always moving to watch people craning their necks for a glimpse of their loved ones. I overhear them saying to each other, "No, I don't see him yet. No, he hasn't gotten off yet." Then suddenly, one of them exclaims, "There he is!" You'd think that the President himself was getting off that plane. If there are children waiting, they make a break through the crowd like a halfback who sees a hole in the line and they're the first to reach Grandpa or Dad or whoever it is. Soon the whole family is embracing and exchanging greetings. Often there are tears of joy, as loved ones are reunited after a long separation. It's a joy to watch. It's the joy of relationships.

It is not an exaggeration to say that relationships are the most important thing in life, because the two greatest commandments in the Bible have to do with right relationships-first toward God and then toward one another. Whenever you see broken relationships toward God or in the family or in the church, you know that it is not pleasing to God. God is in the business of reconciling broken relationships.

There is perhaps nothing so moving as witnessing a fractured family being reconciled and reunited. That's why Genesis 45 is such a moving chapter. We are allowed to look in on the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers after 22 years of separation and estrangement. After Judah's impassioned plea on behalf of Benjamin and their father (Ge 44:18-34), Joseph saw that his brothers had truly repented of their terrible sin of selling him into slavery. So he let himself go in a torrent of emotion, telling his brothers through his tears, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" He knew that his dad was alive, but he wanted to hear it again, just to make sure.

Imagine the rush of confusion and horror which swept over Joseph's brothers when they heard this Egyptian governor say, "I am Joseph." Judah had just finished his appeal when the governor's chest began to heave with emotion. The brothers wouldn't have known whether he was angry or what. Then he shouted something in Egyptian and all his attendants rushed out of the room. Then this man broke into prolonged loud sobbing. The text compresses the story, but as you know, it takes several minutes for someone who is sobbing to calm down enough to talk.

Then, of all things, he spoke in Hebrew! Until now he had spoken only in Egyptian through an interpreter. For 22 years they had spread the rumor that Joseph was dead, to the point that they believed it themselves. To hear Joseph speak was like hearing a corpse talk. And to hear this powerful ruler now say, "I am Joseph," after what they had done to him, their blood ran cold. The word translated "dismayed" (45:3) means to be terrified. It is used to describe the feeling which swept over a group of men in battle when suddenly the enemy turned on them and they realized they were doomed (Judges 20:41). Joseph's brothers thought, "This is it! We've had it!" They were struck speechless. In fact, up to verse 15, Joseph does all the talking.

The brothers' shock over who this man was could only have been increased by what he said. They would have expected him to say, "You guys treated me like dirt. For 22 years I've been waiting for this moment. Now you're going to get it." But there was no hint of revenge. Instead, Joseph spoke kindly to them and showed every intention of treating them well. He promised to provide for them and their children through the coming years of famine. He finished by kissing not only Benjamin, who hadn't been a part of their treachery against Joseph, but also each of his brothers, weeping on their shoulders. It must have blown them away. Finally, they were able to talk, and what a conversation it must have been!

Joseph shows us the key to being reconciled to those who have deeply hurt us, whether they are family members or friends:

The key to reconciliation is your attitude and the key to your attitude is submitting yourself to the sovereign God.

The remarkable thing about Joseph's life was not his brilliance. It was not his administrative ability, although he was gifted there. It was his attitude, especially in response to unfair treatment.

And the reason for his attitude was his relationship to the sovereign God.

### **1. The key to reconciliation is your attitude.**

The right attitude is at the center of good relationships. As you think about people who are easy to get along with, are they grumpy, negative, angry, bitter, vindictive, sarcastic, touchy? Of course not. They're pleasant, positive, relaxed, forgiving, kind, not quick to take offense or hold a grudge. These are attitudes. Reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers never would have taken place if Joseph had harbored a rotten attitude. His forgiving, kind, loving, caring, pleasant attitude, in spite of the horrible rejection and harsh treatment he had received from his brothers, opened the way for them now to be reconciled to him.

As hard a pill as it is to swallow, the key to being reconciled to a family member or friend from whom you are estranged lies in your attitude. I know what you are thinking: What about his or her attitude? I'll talk about that in a moment. Obviously, at some point their attitude also has to change for reconciliation to be complete. But often the key to bringing them to change is when they see how you have responded to the wrong things they have done to you. Often it is the offended person, like Joseph here, who must take the initiative in reconciliation.

When someone wrongs you, you have a choice to make. You may not think so, since your initial response is usually visceral: you feel angry or hurt. But after you cool down, you have an important choice to make. Many in Joseph's situation would have allowed the hurt feelings to grow into a monster that dominated their lives. They would become angry, bitter, hostile people. If they ever met these rotten brothers again, they would be gunning for them. Or at best, they would never let them forget what they had done and how much pain they had caused.

But there's another choice: You can respond as Joseph did. It may have taken him some time to work through things. It usually does. But he didn't stew about it for years. If he had, his bitter spirit would have precluded him from rising to the top in Potiphar's house and in prison. He must have dealt with his attitude early on. The sooner you get to work on it, the better, because the

Bible calls bitterness a root (Heb. 12:15), and as you know, a root is easier to pull out when you don't let it grow for years.

Joseph made a choice before God to forgive his brothers and to trust God to deal with them and to right the wrongs. To forgive means that you choose to absorb the pain and loss caused by the other person and they go free, even when they don't deserve it. Forgiveness is costly for the one doing the forgiving. When God forgives our sins in Christ, it doesn't mean that He brushes them aside. It means that Jesus Christ paid the penalty so that we could go free. Jesus said that just as God has forgiven us, so we must forgive others from our hearts (Matt. 18:21-35).

So the key to reconciliation is your attitude. Ask God to give you His love and forgiveness toward the one who has wronged you. You've got to focus on your attitude, not on the other person's behavior or attitude. It's clear that Joseph had forgiven his brothers long before they came to a place of repentance.

You're probably thinking, "But I don't feel forgiving toward that person. If I'm honest with my feelings, I'd have to say that I want that person to pay for what he did to me. How can I have a forgiving attitude when I feel like inflicting revenge or at least praying the imprecatory Psalms?" The key to reconciliation is your attitude. And,

## **2. The key to your attitude is submitting yourself to the sovereign God.**

One of the most noticeable characteristics of Joseph throughout these chapters is the centrality of God in his life. This is such an important concept, if only we could grasp it in our daily lives. So often, even for Christians, God is a part of their lives, but He's not at the center. He is a spoke in the wheel of life, but He's not the hub. But for Joseph, everything centered on God.

When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he immediately thought of God: "How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (Ge 39:9). When Joseph was in the dungeon and the cupbearer and baker had their dreams, Joseph's response was, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (Ge 40:8). When he was called before Pharaoh, who said, "I hear you can interpret dreams," Joseph said, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." (Ge 41:16). And in giving Pharaoh the interpretation, Joseph used God's name four times to underscore to Pharaoh that it was God who was revealing what was about to happen (Ge 41:25, 28, 32).

When Joseph's wife bore him two sons, he gave them names that bore witness to God's faithfulness. He named the first Manasseh, saying, "God has made me forget all my trouble ..."; and he named the second Ephraim, saying, "God has made me fruitful ..." (Ge 41:51, 52). When Joseph's brothers came to buy grain, even though Joseph wanted to disguise himself from them, he could not hide his relationship with God. He told them, "Do this and live, for I fear God" (Ge 42:18). When they returned with Benjamin, Joseph, still disguising himself, said to his brother, "May God be gracious to you, my son" (Ge 43:29). Joseph's steward had told the worried brothers concerning the money returned to their sacks, "Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks" (Ge 43:23). Obviously, Joseph had told the steward to say that.

At the end of Genesis, when Joseph's brothers feared that he would pay them back now that their father was dead, he replied, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Ge 50:19, 20). Just before his death, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Ge 50:24, 25).

From the first to the last, the sovereign God was at the center of Joseph's life. Notice this emphasis in our text: "... for God sent me before you to preserve life" (45:5); "And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth" (Ge 45:7); "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh ..." (45:8); "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, "God has made me lord of all Egypt"'" (Ge 45:9).

Some have wondered if Joseph's telling his father of his splendor in Egypt was pride on Joseph's part. But in light of his relationship to God, I think not. Rather, by emphasizing his position and wealth, Joseph was trying to get his brothers and father to see that God had worked everything out right, so that they would

trust in God and be reconciled to one another. And, he wanted Jacob to hear of his circumstances so that he would praise God for His ways, which had worked together for good. That's why God is the subject of Joseph's first sentence to his father (45:9). He wanted his father to know what God had done.

**There are two practical lessons for us which flow from Joseph's relationship to God:**

### **(1) You must learn to relate God to every event in your life, whether good or seemingly bad.**

Joseph had some things happen to him which were very unfair and unpleasant. He went in obedience to his father to find out the welfare of his brothers, only to have them sell him into slavery. He resisted Potiphar's wife and maintained his moral purity only to be falsely accused and thrown in prison. He was kind and sensitive toward the cupbearer and baker in interpreting their dreams, only to have the cupbearer forget him for the next two years. And yet Joseph related God to all these unfair events.

To do this, you've got to look past what seem to be the primary causes, to God who is really the primary cause. It looks like somebody mistreated you; but really, it is God disciplining you as a loving father disciplines his child. The apostle Paul did this. To all outward appearances, it looked like he was a prisoner of Caesar. But he never referred to himself that way. Rather, it was always, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus." Yes, Rome had wrongly thrown Paul in prison; but it wasn't Rome-it was the Lord! Even if it's Satan who is causing you problems (which is relatively rare), he can't do anything which God hasn't allowed him to do. God's purpose in all the things which seem to be against you is to bring ultimate glory to Himself and good to you as you trust Him. That leads to the second lesson. Once you see that God is related to every event, then ...

### **(2) You must submit to God's sovereignty in every event in your life.**

This is a matter of the heart, where you trust that He is good and that He is in control, even when it seems otherwise. Your only other option is to believe that what happens is a matter of chance. That's the evolutionist's explanation for life: We're here as the product of chance plus time. Maybe we can pull some of our own strings to improve our lot, but some things are just due to chance. But

many Christians, who would deny evolution, live as if it were true when they complain about trials as if they've been dealt a bad hand in the game of life. When things go wrong, they don't stop to acknowledge that God is dealing with them and to submit to His sovereignty.

I'm not talking about a blind resignation to events, where we blame God for our own irresponsibility. We are responsible for our actions, and yet God is sovereign over all and we must submit to Him. Each person is responsible for his own sin, and yet God overrules even the sinful things people do and uses them to accomplish His purpose. When you submit to God's ultimate sovereignty, you can say with Joseph, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." The key to reconciliation with those who have hurt you is your attitude, and the key to your attitude is relating every event in your life to God and submitting to His loving sovereignty in those events.

I still haven't answered the questions, "What about those who have wronged me? Don't they need to change? Can there be true reconciliation if they don't repent?" For there to be complete reconciliation, all parties concerned must come under the lordship of Jesus Christ. If Joseph's brothers had refused to repent of their sinful ways, there could only have been a strained truce, at best. We live in a sinful world, where God has given people freedom of choice. Sometimes, in spite of our having the right attitude and being rightly related to God, those who have wronged us continue in their sinful ways. Not every relationship will work out neatly or quickly. But when it does, it's worth all the time and effort expended to make it right.

But whether it works out or not, we each are responsible for our own attitude before God. When my attitude is right and God is the center of my life, often it will motivate the one who wronged me to deal with his sin before God. When he sees that I harbor no resentment or bitterness for what he did to me, often he will be drawn to the God who has given me such grace. Assuming you have a right attitude before God, I conclude by giving two action points on how to deal with the one who has wronged you.

Conclusion

### **1. Express your forgiving, loving spirit, first non-verbally, then verbally, at the proper time.**

Joseph forgave his brothers in his heart long before he expressed it to them. He waited to see their repentance before extending forgiveness, but he didn't wait to deal with his bitterness and to forgive them in his heart. That's an important distinction! God has made provision for the forgiveness of sinners before they repent. But He doesn't extend forgiveness to them, and there can be no reconciliation between God and the sinner, until the sinner repents. Since we are to forgive as God has forgiven us, it seems to me that we must maintain that distinction.

So what do we do until the other person repents? Do we sit with our arms folded, thinking, "When he comes crawling, begging for forgiveness, I'll do it, but not until then!" If that's your attitude, you haven't forgiven the person as God wants you to. If you've forgiven him, you won't make him pay, because you absorb the cost of his wrong. If you've forgiven him, you won't be hoping he gets zapped, but you'll be praying and earnestly desiring that he will come into a right relationship with God. You'll have the joy and peace of Christ in your heart, and you'll want the same for him.

So what do you do while you wait for him to repent? Hard as it is, you look for opportunities to do kind things for him. Remember, it's the kindness of God that leads us to repentance (Ro 2:4). God Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men (Luke 6:35). Just as Joseph was kind to his brothers by returning their money, stuffing their sacks with extra grain, feeding them, talking kindly to them, and now, promising to provide for them and their families, so we must do kind things for those who have wronged us.

Josephine Ligon ("Your Daffodils are Pretty," Christianity Today [3/2/79], p.18) tells of a family named Parsons in the town where she grew up who preached and practiced forgiveness. Once Josephine and several of her third grade friends put a handful of pencil shavings into the Parsons girl's sandwich, just to be mean and to make her mad. But she didn't get mad. Instead, the next day, without any sign of repentance from her persecutors, the Parsons girl brought everyone in the class a large, delicious, hand-decorated cookie which said, "Jesus loves you." Over 40 years later Josephine Ligon still remembered that demonstration of forgiveness more than any sermon.

When the time is right and the person seems to be sorry for what he's done, express your forgiveness verbally. You need to do it privately, as Joseph did. You shouldn't paper over the offense or pretend that it wasn't serious. Twice Joseph states their crime of selling him (45:4, 5). But his focus wasn't on their crime, but on how God overruled things. He wanted to help his brothers trust in the sovereign God who can even use our past sinfulness for His glory.

Also, express your feelings, not just words. Joseph openly wept and he hugged and kissed each of his

brothers (45:14, 15). People need to feel that they're forgiven, not just to hear it.

## **2. As God gives opportunity, help the estranged ones to see God's perspective.**

Joseph explains to his brothers how God was at work in this whole process (Ge 45:5-8). If he had explained things earlier, they would not have been teachable, but now they are ready to listen. This may involve more pain for you as you wait for God to deal with them. While Joseph waited for God to deal with his brothers, he also waited to see his father, which he badly wanted to do. Like Joseph, you may have to wait for years before the person comes to repentance or before there can be a face to face meeting. But then, when God works it out, you can help him to interpret the past events from God's perspective.

You may even have the joy of leading the one who wronged you to personal faith in Jesus Christ. The good news is that though we all have wronged God, through Christ's death on the cross He paid the penalty we deserved. As you model His love and forgiveness, it could open the door for the one who wronged you to experience God's forgiveness, which is his greatest need. God has given to us "the ministry of reconciliation, 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" (2 Cor. 5:18-19). If you will deal with your attitude by forgiving those who have wronged you and by submitting yourself to the sovereign God's dealings with you, He will use you as His agent of reconciliation to those who have wronged you. And you will know the joy of restored, loving, God-centered relationships.