

RECONCILIATION

Fellowship with God

calls this aspect of salvation “reconciliation.” Reconciliation with God is one of the great benefits of the gospel of saving grace. Three simple observations summarize the New Testament’s teaching about reconciliation.

The Necessity of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is necessary, first, *because men are enemies of God* (see Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21; James 4:4). By birth and instinct man is alienated from God and exists in a state of hostility with Him. By behavior he demonstrates that hatred with actual transgressions against God and His law. Not only does natural man not enjoy any fellowship with God, he does not desire any friendship with Him. When Adam sinned in the garden, the first act of his fallen will was to hide from God. This was no game of hide and seek; it was the hateful expression of his desire to have nothing to do with his creator. Adam’s children have been doing that ever since.

Reconciliation is necessary, second, *because God regards sinners as His enemies*. Sin caused a mutual animosity between God and men. The Scripture declares in no uncertain terms that God hates “all workers of iniquity” (Psalm 5:5;

11:5). That God “hates” sinners means that He rejects them and places them under divine wrath and condemnation. It is a mistaken and unscriptural view of God that sees Him as a God of love that overlooks and tolerates sin. If it were not true that the righteous God rejects all sinners, there would be no need of a gospel at all. But here is the mystery and beauty of gospel grace: “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). It is only through and in Christ that sinners can ever know and experience the love of God.

The Character of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is *divine activity*. Although there is mutual hostility between God and sinners, God has taken the initiative in restoring fellowship. The exegetical evidence of the New Testament is that God is always the subject of the reconciling act, and man or the world is always the object (see 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:21). If he were left to himself, man would never make a move to restore fellowship because he has no natural desire or ability to bridge the infinite distance between himself and God. But the offended God, in His good pleasure, has “reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18). Whereas the Scripture identifies God as the source of reconciliation, it always reveals Christ as the

The *Larger Catechism* asks the question: “What misery did the fall bring upon mankind?” The answer compresses the Scripture as it defines man’s estate of sin and misery: “The fall brought upon mankind the loss of communion with God, His displeasure and curse; so as we are by nature children of wrath, bond slaves to Satan, and justly liable to all the punishments in this world, and that which is to come.” Sin has fixed a great chasm between God and man that man cannot bridge. God, however, has done for man what man cannot do for himself. By the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord has graciously, yet justly, removed the impediments to fellowship with Himself. The Scripture

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agent and his atoning death as the means whereby reconciliation is accomplished (see Colossians 1:20–22; Romans 5:8–10). By His death, Christ propitiated or appeased the wrath of the offended God and satisfied the divine justice against sin. Reconciliation is the result of God's absolute satisfaction with Christ and His atoning death. With His shed blood and sacrificial death, Jesus Christ swept away every barrier to fellowship with God. Because God was satisfied with Christ, it is possible for sinners for whom Christ died to enjoy God's satisfaction as well.

Reconciliation is *objective*; it is something that has been accomplished *for* man, not *in* man. The love of God manifested in reconciliation is not focused on the moment a man believes, evidencing his changed attitude about God; rather, it is focused on the objective, historic event of the cross where Christ died while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8,10). Reconciliation is not primarily concerned with man's attitude about God, but God's attitude toward man. This is why Paul says "we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans 5:11; note the word *atonement* in the AV is actually the word *reconciliation*). The finished work of Christ achieved a peace with God at infinite cost. To be reconciled with God, man has but to receive by faith what God has already done in Christ.

The Results of Reconciliation

There are two significant results of God's reconciling sinners to Himself. First, there is *a subjective change within man*. Although reconciliation is the work of God in Christ, Paul issues the imperative "be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). To obey this command is to personally appropriate by faith what Christ has done. By faith in Christ, sinners embrace God's reconciliation. To reject the provision of Christ is to remain an enemy of God. However, in Christ, man's relationship to God changes. Hate becomes love—"we love Him because He first loved us." In Christ everything is different (see 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:22).

Second, there is *peace with God*. Colossians 1:20 says that Christ made peace through the blood of His cross. Consequently, God's treatment of those in Christ is different; no longer does He regard believers as enemies, but as friends (Colossians 1:21). Hostility and animosity are gone; God's wrath is no longer a threat to those in Christ. Since the believer's relationship with God has changed, he can enjoy an inward peace of mind and assurance that all is well with God.

Reconciliation is one of the unbreakable links in the golden chain of salvation. It highlights the beauty, grace, and mystery of

the gospel. In human relationships we would expect the offender to somehow make amends to win back the favor of the offended. But in the gospel, the offended God does everything to bring sinners to Himself. Since He does it, believing sinners need never despair that something else must be done to assure peace and fellowship with God. ■

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