

Review

Last time we studied 2 Corinthians 5, we saw that verse 17 teaches us that everyone who is in Christ is a new creature, a fresh creation. The old has gone and the new has come. Now we come to a wonderful passage in Scripture that talks about *reconciliation*. But before we get there we have to understand what this doctrine presupposes.

The Problem: Enmity

The Bible says that all of mankind is **estranged** from God. You can call it hostility or estrangement or whatever, but it is a fact nonetheless. Maybe it is a revelation to some that they are God's enemies. They bounce through life oblivious to this fact. Even if they believe that there is a God, they might ask, doesn't God love everyone—so how could he be my enemy? Yes, it is true, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to die for their sins. But at the same time, mankind is under the wrath of God for sin. We all are born at enmity with God. This is made plain in many Bible verses: Isa. 59:2, Rom. 5:10, Eph. 2:12, 4:18, Col. 1:21, James 4:4.

This strong disharmony is **not limited to man's conscious, hostile attitude** toward God. That is, a man might be one to shake his fist in God's face, and he would obviously be an enemy of God. But also the little old lady who wouldn't hurt a flea but also doesn't care for the gospel at all is God's enemy. Another way of putting this is that there is an objective ground of the enmity. It is not just feelings. It has to do with sin and that God cannot be friendly toward sin.

Furthermore, **enmity is not just God noting people's ill feelings toward him**. He is actively displeased with people who reject him. The Bible teaches that God does have enemies. He is not "buddy buddy" with sinners. David tells of his perfect hatred for the enemies of God (Ps. 139:19-22). Isa. 63:10 teaches that God turned and became an enemy of Israel. 1 Cor. 15:25 shows that Christ's has enemies even today that he is awaiting to be subjected to Him. James 4:4-6 says that God is opposed to the proud person, the one who makes his friendship with the world. Psalm 7:11 tells us that God is angry with the wicked every day. The Lord hates iniquity (Heb. 1:9; Ps. 45:7). He even abhors the wicked person (Psalm 5:6).

The Solution: Reconciliation

Reconciliation means that a **harmonious relationship is established** between two parties. Webster puts it: "to make friendly...win over to a friendly attitude." In human relationships, we could say such a relationship is "restored" to previous harmony, but in God-human relationships we cannot say that since no one was in harmony with God to begin with (except Adam and Eve).

Reconciliation can be of a non-saving sort, like that reconciliation of "all things" in the millennium (Col. 1:20, Rom. 8:18-22), whether by a transformation or sheer force (Phil. 2:9-11). Reconciliation can also be non-saving in the sense that it is between two people (Matt. 5:23-24). Some teachers highlight this inter-human idea as if it is taught here—as if we in the church are mainly to be about the business of reconciling ourselves to each other. But au contraire! We should endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," (Eph. 4:3) and avoid the need for reconciliation in the first place!

The type of **reconciliation we have here is the saving sort**, between God and man (Rom. 5:10-11, 2 Cor. 5:18-19). This results in reconciliation between groups of people, as between Jews and Gentiles in Eph. 2:16.

I. What Has God Done for Us? – 5:18

The verse starts by mentioning once again the "all things" that came up earlier: all the new attitudes (v. 16) and all the radical changes that happen to the "new creation" (v. 17). Apart from God, NONE of this would happen. We would do well to contemplate this truth. We have nothing we have not received—materially or spiritually. It is all from God.

A. Personal Reconciliation with God – 5:18a**cf. Rom. 5:10-11**

There are three parties involved according to this text:

1. God makes the reconciliation. This is the objective part of it. He is *active* in it. He did not change, per se, as He is immutable. In fact, man did not change either. It is the potentiality and provision of a possible relationship that has changed. There was no possibility apart from Christ's work. In Him, there is all kinds of possibility!

2. Man receives reconciliation, Rom. 5:10-11. This is the subjective part of it. Man is *passive* in it. He simply receives the benefits of non-imputation of sin, forgiveness, favor, harmony, etc. at the time of his conversion. Man receives this all in one piece. His personal hostility toward the things of God will certainly be greatly muted at the time of salvation, and those feelings will be gradually more removed in sanctification.

3. Christ is the agent of reconciliation. He brings God and man together by His work.

B. Personal Commission to the Ministry of Reconciliation – 5:18b

Paul can speak specifically for himself, and for all believers generally. He has been given a service or ministry to help other people see the benefits that are available in Christ. The content of this ministry is not specifically stated other than just "reconciliation," but the point is that it *has* been given. There is a heavy note of responsibility here (1 Cor. 9:16), but also a note of privilege. Note also that this is a service to mankind—like the deacons offer us service.

II. What Is the Ministry of Reconciliation? – 5:19

The phrase "that is" at the beginning of verse 19 ("to wit," KJV) explains what came just before, namely the "ministry of reconciliation." What exactly is that? This verse tells us very plainly. Interestingly, it simply consists of reporting just what already happened to us from the previous verse: 1) we were reconciled to God; 2) God gave us a ministry of reconciliation. So, we tell the next "generation" the same thing – what God did in providing reconciliation for the world, and that God has committed to us that message. We thus urge them to be saved (v. 20).

A. Announcement of World-Wide Reconciliation with God – 5:19a**cf. Rom. 11:15**

There seems to be two phases of reconciliation: one is the removal of the ground of difficulty, and the other is the actual change in relation. The first phase is the reconciling of the world, the second the application of that to the individual. The reconciliation of the world is not precisely the same as the personal reconciliation that occurs at salvation. Saying God loved the WORLD is far different than saying God loved ME! God reconciled the WORLD is likewise far different than God reconciled ME. Christ died for the sins of the WORLD...Christ died for ME!

World-wide reconciliation is just this: it is God's *provision* that makes possible a personal involvement in reconciliation through the death of Christ. His atoning work pays for sin and thus removes the barrier causing enmity between God and man. This is the objective side of reconciliation. Personal reconciliation carries that a step farther by *applying* the *provision* to the individual. This is the subjective side of reconciliation.

This reconciliation is explained in terms of the non-imputation of sin to human kind. This is how the reconciliation was accomplished, for as long as men have their trespasses and have no payment made for them, they are enemies of God. But when the reckoning of sins is removed (and placed on someone else), then harmony can be re-established. Praise the Lord! To impute means to consider or count something some way. There are three significant imputations in the Bible: 1) Adam's sin to humankind (Rom. 5:12); 2) Mankind's sin to Christ (2 Cor. 5:21); 3) Christ's righteousness to men (Rom. 3:22, 2 Cor. 5:21, Phil. 3:9). This reckoning is not just a mental exercise in God—it has a reality to it! The transfer of sin here is real and meaningful.

How could God treat us this way? Did God vaporize our sins into thin air? No: the sins were instead imputed to Christ (v. 21). He actually paid for them. They were ours, and he took them up on our behalf before God.

Notice that this work was done in Christ. Our Lord's work was a reconciling work, not a condemning or destructive one. The Lord's work did not in itself condemn people—it was intended to help them. It does highlight, however, that those who do not accept it are condemned.

B. Commitment to Proclaim the Reconciliation Message – 5:19b

The point of this part of the verse is that it is the job of the reconciled (v. 18) to proclaim the message (λογος, word) of reconciliation. There is only one way the message gets out, and that is the proclamation of the word. This is an integral part of the Great Commission.

Conclusion

The focus is on the wonderful message that the basis of enmity has been eliminated. God did it. God in a sense is simply waiting for men to be reconciled to him. There is no reason that they cannot leave their enmity behind by a faith-filled commitment to Christ. MAP

Additional Review

We focused on the fact presented in the 5:17 that Christian has a new character about him. We could have looked at this from at least two angles: what is new, and what was old. We looked mainly at the new stuff, all the benefits that come in salvation. We could have also looked at what was old. For instance, the fact that we were enemies of God, in slavery to sin, guilty and liable for sin's punishment, in Adam, in the kingdom of darkness, without God, separated from any of God's saving benefits.

There was one further important point that we did not mention before, but that is crucial to note it in today's watered-down Christian thought. And that is, we should focus for a moment on the miraculous transformation that occurs in the life of a believer. Whether someone emphasizes "decisionalism" in their effort to count 'new disciples," or whether they propose a view of faith that eliminates any kind of volitional acceptance and commitment to Christ, they can easily overlook that when anyone comes to be 'in Christ," he is a new creation. God does some marvelous and miraculous things in that person. Someone doesn't experience such a transformation and not have *some kind* of alteration in their life, some kind of rearrangement of their priorities, some reversal in their desires, some change in their focus. Another way this can be said is that Christianity is not just in the realm of the abstract or legal, but it also massively affects the tangible and experiential aspects of life. Just because one says they are a Christian does not mean that it is so. See Acts 8:9-23 (analysis: following the crowd type of belief, desire for magical powers, bound by iniquity).

On the two phases of reconciliation: A difference between people can be settled or "agreed upon" but someone wants to be mad just to be mad.