

THE CHURCH

CENTER FOR RECONCILIATION

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Ephesians 2:16 and
Colossians 1:20-21

The Church

Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church,"
Matthew 18:17 reconciling relationships

(Discussion)

The Transformative Power of the Gospel

The Gospel of Jesus is the answer to the relational and societal brokenness of the world. It has the power to reconcile mankind to one another, transcending divisions and fostering unity. As Christians, we are called to run with this one message, to proclaim the Good News of reconciliation and invite others to experience the transformative power of the Gospel in their own lives.

Embracing Reconciliation: A Personal Journey

Reconciliation begins with a personal decision to embrace the message of Jesus and be reconciled to God. It is an acknowledgment that we are sinners in need of a Savior and a surrendering of our lives to Him. Through faith in Jesus, we can experience forgiveness, amazing grace, and the assurance of being received by God. Reconciliation with God opens the door to reconciliation with others.

ALIENATION

The book of Genesis tells us that humans were created in the image of God, walking in perfect harmony with Him and each other. Because we distrusted God's authority and goodness, we severed that relationship. This resulted in hostility with God and creation. But it also created enmity among all humankind.

This is what prompted Paul to declare, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It's not just that humans were guilty of sin, but they fell short of the very thing for which they were created: revealing God's glory.

The Old Testament tells the story of God fashioning a nation called Israel. This nation would serve as missionaries to the world, demonstrating God's goodness and character to the surrounding nations. But the relationship between God and Israel was often a tug of war. God's law helped provide the necessary guardrails to keep His relationship with the Jews functional, but they still demonstrated a tendency to go their own way and do their own thing.

This created a constant cycle of disobedience, judgment, and repentance throughout the Old Testament. God's relationship with His people was maintained by His patient commitment to Israel and not by the depth of their faithfulness.

Forgiveness in the Old Testament

The estrangement between God and humankind was a problem that needed to be solved. As early as Cain and Abel, offerings were being made to bridge this gap (Genesis 4:3-5). And Job offered burnt offerings on behalf of his children in case they needed to be forgiven for some unknown infraction:

When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning, he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom (Job 1:5).

Within the law of Moses, some provisions provided forgiveness for sin.

They shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven (Leviticus 4:31).

While those sacrifices dealt with the offense of sin, they were never entirely able to take them away. The writer of Hebrews wrote about the limitations of the law when it came to sin:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Here, the writer of Hebrews points out that sacrifices under the law were never able to adequately deal with our sins and alienation from God. This is demonstrated by the fact that Israel was caught on a treadmill requiring them to offer the same sacrifices over and over again.

The writer calls them "an annual reminder of sins," meaning that not only were these sacrifices insufficient to deal with our problem-they were a constant indication that the problem was there.

The difference between forgiveness and reconciliation

When we look at the relationship between God and humanity in the Old Testament, we see a vast difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Through a system of sacrifices, Israelites received forgiveness, but their relationship with God was never fully restored.

And while forgiveness is a necessary component of reconciliation, it's only part of the solution. We see this in our own relationships. We may forgive what someone has done to us, but that doesn't necessarily restore the relationship. In human relationships, reconciliation requires both parties to bring something to the table in order to fix the relationship.

God was in the unique position of wanting to make peace with humankind when we were neither interested in nor capable of reconciliation.

God's plan to reconcile the world

Paul does an amazing job of revealing how Jesus fulfilled God's plan:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

Jesus was just another person trying to reconcile other human beings to God. As Paul explains it, Jesus is God Himself. He was there when the world was formed, and not only did He play a part in the creation of everything, but He's also responsible for holding everything together. Jesus was, in fact, God in the flesh, and the sacrifice He provided changed everything.

Paul describes what Jesus accomplished that every other sacrifice was unable to achieve. It made peace, and this peace is a fundamental component of reconciliation.

The apostle goes on to explain:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (Colossians 1:21-24).

This helps to explain the problem the children of Israel ran into with the law. While the sacrificial system allowed them to maintain a working relationship with God, it never fixed the underlying hostility. This became evident in Israel's cycle of disobedience.

But Jesus's one-time sacrifice was able to accomplish some essential work:

- It made us holy before God.
The word "holy" literally means "set apart." Like the holy temple furnishings, we're made holy for the sole purpose of loving and serving God.
- It made us without blemish.
When God looks at us in Christ, He sees us through the lens of Jesus's ample sacrifice.
- It made us free from accusation.
As we apply Jesus's sacrifice to our lives, we're set free from charges that could be leveled against us. Our enemy, the devil, hurls accusations at each of us to discredit us before God. Jesus's redemptive sacrifice puts us out of the reach of those allegations. In fact, Revelation promises us that "the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night" will be hurled down (Revelation 12:10).

Becoming ministers of reconciliation

Jesus's sacrifice was the beginning of God's great work to make peace with His creation. Those who decide to follow Jesus become part of this process. This is what Paul tells the Corinthian church:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

When we come to Jesus, we're transformed and equipped to become ministers of reconciliation. What that means is that we don't just receive the gift of peace with God, but we also inherit the responsibility to share that gift with others. As Paul says, God is at work reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. And the church is His ambassadors, inviting the world to come and be reconciled with the King.

This is why the church has been commissioned to fulfill [the Great Commission](#). It is through us that God makes His appeal to the world to come and live in harmony with God.

Demonstrating reconciliation in the body of Christ

This call to reconciliation extends beyond humanity's relationship with God and impacts our relationship with one another. Obviously, life is just better when we're able to live at peace with one another, but living in agreement and fellowship serves another purpose, too. It reinforces the validity of our reconciliation with God.

This is why Jesus tells the disciples, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Paul communicates this beautifully in his letter to the Ephesians. Here he talks about the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles, but the implication extends beyond these specific groups:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:14-22).

In our separation from God, humanity devolved into a million warring factions. Instead of trying to resolve all the things that divide us, God makes one new harmonious structure out of all of these disparate pieces-making peace.

Reconciliation lies at the heart of the Gospel

The word "gospel" means "good news." And it's good news that while we were enemies of God, He was hard at work devising a plan to repair our broken relationship. We must demonstrate our gratefulness by inviting others to discover what it means to be reconciled with God.

On top of that, we must be living in harmony with one another. When the world sees God's people living at peace, it awakens the deep hunger we all have to love and to be loved. As the church models what reconciliation looks like in practical ways, it adds to the gospel message's validity.