

“Be Ye Reconciled to God”

When we think of reconciliation, we think of two parties who, having once been at odds, are now back together. We hear of husbands and wives separating and then reconciling. We read of labor unions and management reconciling their wage and benefit disputes. On a much deeper level, the Bible speaks of reconciliation that not only can take place but **MUST** take place if a person desires to live eternally in heaven. That reconciliation is between God and sinful mankind.

In the New Testament we find a few different words translated “reconcile,” “reconciled” and “reconciliation.” The one on which this article focuses is used ten times. Five of those times it is found in one particular section of sacred scripture.

In II Corinthians 5:17-21 we read, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

The primary definition of the Greek word used in these verses has its origin in the halls of monetary exchange. Thayer’s Lexicon defines it as “to change, exchange, as coins for others of equivalent value.” This is significant in that Paul is talking about a spiritual exchange. It is the exchange of the blood of Christ for sinful man. It shows the all-sufficiency of the blood of Christ to ransom mankind from eternal damnation. His blood is a fair and adequate exchange for the souls of those who obey Him and avail themselves of the efficacy of that blood. Nothing else is needed for redemption. Christ’s blood is sufficient to bring a fallen soul back into favor with the Father.

In verse 19 Paul mentions the fact that God had committed to him the word of reconciliation. This He did by inspiration (I Corinthians 2:7ff). This word of reconciliation was the message that Paul and the other inspired men had delivered, namely, that Jesus Christ came into the world in the flesh, lived a sinless life, gave His life for the sins of mankind and then rose victorious over the grave. Why did the Lord give His inspired writers and speakers this word of reconciliation? It’s because mankind needs to be reconciled to God. Furthermore, individual men and women must make this decision to be reconciled to God. If all of humanity is to be saved in eternity regardless of their lives on earth then there would be no need for this word of reconciliation. For that matter, would there really be a need for reconciliation at all? Would not God just overlook sin in its entirety? Why would He send the Savior to die if everyone is going to be saved? In that the Lord gave Christ as the reconciliation and then inspired His word of reconciliation, He is showing us that we need to know and obey this word. Not everyone will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14; 21-23). Our sins have separated us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). We need to be brought back to Him. The word of reconciliation tells us how.

Verse 20 closes with the command to be reconciled to God. Again, this demonstrates God’s demand for individual responsibility. Take a look at this in light of statements made in verses 18 and 19 though. In those verses Paul says that God “hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” and “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” Taken by themselves, these two statements seem to suggest that the reconciliation is all God’s part. Taken by themselves, these two statements seem to say that God has done everything to bring lost souls back to Him and that there is nothing for the lost souls to do. However, when these two statements are examined in light of verse 20, it is obvious that mankind also has a role in being reconciled to God. It is so important to consider the complete context of Bible passages. Doing so here helps us understand that while reconciliation has been made possible by God and is freely offered by Him, we ourselves must respond to that offer. In earthly matters, two separated parties cannot be united without agreement from both. The same is true regarding spiritual reconciliation. By His grace, God allows us to be reconciled to Him. It is up to us to agree to accept His offer on His terms by obeying His Gospel.

This is a powerful series of verses. Here we are reminded of our separation from God. We're also reminded that we need not stay in this state of separation because Jesus Christ came to bring us back to God. Having once been at odds spiritually with the Lord, we can have our sin-stained souls washed clean by the blood of the Lamb who exchanged His life for ours.

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