

2017-03-19_Sermon
Be Reconciled to God
Romans 5:1-11

Reconciliation is the most pressing need we face today. It outranks our need for security, future assurance, or acceptance by others. In fact, the reconciliation of which I speak goes even deeper than our need to forgive one another and get on with our lives. Very simply stated, reconciliation is the end of estrangement and the restoration of friendship between God and us.

You might ask, “Have I been estranged from God?
Has my friendship with Him cooled off or at least become lukewarm?”

Perhaps everyone in this room, including myself, has felt this way at one time or another.

There have been times when we felt as though God let us down, especially when we have fervently prayed for something and it was not granted the way we thought it should have been. At other times, we have simply drifted away from a consciousness of God's presence as we became involved with the concerns of daily life. Yes, there have been times when our friendship with God felt more remote than at other times.

Yet, there is a truth in today's Epistle that we must face. Although we might feel at times as though our friendship with God is more theoretical than real, the fact is that God is never out of friendship with us. God's reconciliation with us is a completed fact, guaranteed by Jesus' shed blood on the cross. That reality does not change, regardless of how we feel at a particular moment in our lives.

Today's Epistle focuses on Jesus as the Reconciler. To be the Reconciler means that Jesus brings to an end the estrangement between God and us and restores the friendship God has with us since the moment of human creation.

It is a completed act on Jesus' part requiring only our acceptance in faith that Jesus has done it for us. It cancels the effect our human sin has on God's intent to be friends with us. It justifies us before God, but it enhances the result of justification in one important aspect. God's justification declares us "not guilty" of the sins we have committed. It is a legal term. Reconciliation however goes further. Reconciliation restores the intimate friendship we had with God before we sinned. Rather than being a legal term, reconciliation is a relational expression.

Paul writes in today's Epistle,

“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:9-11)

Summarizing what Paul has said, the death of Jesus on the cross brought about a completed state of reconciliation between God and us. It was His act completed while we were still at enmity with God. The death of Jesus did not persuade God to love us.

The cross is a concrete earthly confirmation that God loves us, no matter how we feel about Him.

Paul goes on to speak about our ongoing experience of “being saved by His life,”—that is, of continuing to interact with God through our sharing life with the Risen Jesus Christ. When we think of the word “saved” as meaning “healed” (as it does in Paul’s Greek language), it opens up a special realm of understanding for us.

Being “saved” or “healed” by Jesus’ risen life speaks of His binding up our ongoing emotional and spiritual wounds which have separated us from intimacy with God. That’s an ongoing process of grace for all of us. What we mean by ongoing grace is God’s continual giving of His help to us for overcoming the challenges that face us.

Paul speaks of us having “obtained access into this grace in which we stand.” (Romans 5:2)

Justification by our faith in the saving death of Jesus gave us original access into His grace, but it is Jesus' reconciliation of us with God which gives us continual access. Paul is reminding us that grace stands over the entire Christian experience as we seek to live a Christ-centered life day to day. The hymn, "Amazing Grace", puts this idea very well. While it reminds us of our justification—that God's amazing grace has saved "a wretch like me", it also reminds us that we live in continuous reconciliation with God when we sing, "Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

God's reconciling grace is therefore a constant presence in our lives.

Its presence is not rooted in our attempts to live good Christian lives, but in God's continuous attitude toward us—an attitude of constantly loving us, no matter how we treat Him.

Jesus came among us to demonstrate this attitude. Jesus showed us that the heart of God yearned for reconciliation with us, even to the extreme point that God Himself paid the terrible price for our offending His perfect justice. As Paul reminds us, even while we were enemies of God, ignoring Him, and even cursing Him, God allowed His Son Jesus to be sacrificed for us on an ugly cross so that it might occur to us how much God loves us. God's love of us didn't need changing. What needed changing was our human hearts which had grown cold toward God.

How did the cross create the ground for this great reconciliation?

The crucifixion event inaugurated a new covenant brought into effect by the limitless pouring out of a single perfect life—the only way atonement for every sin in human history could be done! Hebrews 9:16 reminds us that it takes the death of the testator to bring into effect the New Covenant, based not on rules, but on faith in the person of Jesus who activated God's plan for rescuing us from our own self-destructive sins.

Jesus gave the only life He had to establish this new constitution for God's Kingdom. For Jesus, it was bloody and it was cruel. At that awful moment on the cross, Jesus became the focal point of all the human cruelty we use to justify what we think are good ends. Those who crucified Jesus thought they were defending God's institutional structure.

Yet in the midst of all this ugliness, Jesus reached out to us in reconciliation and released a flow of grace which still engulfs us today. That flow of grace is God's unconditional love of us.

Why do we take this grace and unconditional love so lightly? Often we try to ignore God and do our own thing. Why do we treat the worship of God so lightly letting other things intrude on that sacred calling? Why do we rationalize doing what we feel like doing in place of worshipping God?

God's reconciling love may be free for us, but it is not cheap. It cost Jesus His life! We cannot presume upon it with impunity. It hurts the heart of God who loves us with infinitely more depth than any human being offers on earth.

God is reconciled to us. Jesus' fleshly death on the cross proves it for all time. The question is, are we reconciled to God?

Is God really first in our love or have we substituted others such as our spouse or family? The beautiful thing about reconciling grace is that if we put God first in our love and devotion, all the other loves we have will fall into their proper places. We shall also receive an extraordinary capacity to be forgiving and reconciling when we become the object of someone else's contempt. When we fully receive God's reconciliation as His gift to us, we are motivated to share this gift with others who need to be reconciled to us.

Reconciliation with God is truly our most pressing need today. It is the key to our being reconciled with each other. While forgiveness is the first step, the restoration of friendship is always our ultimate goal if we are to see the Kingdom of God visible on earth. There are no enemies in this heavenly community—only reconciled sinners!

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Let us be for God and each other what He
intends for us to be.