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# The Words of Our Salvation -- Reconciliation

Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

November 21, 2004 - Sunday Evening

**Introduction** Two Sunday evenings ago we began a series which is examining the words of our salvation. Dan spoke on the word redemption the first Sunday evening, and propitiation last Sunday evening. Tonight I am examining the word reconciliation. We are taking the time to go over these important words in order to refresh our memories, instruct where instruction is needed, dispel error where error is present, and give us reason to rejoice once again in what God has done through Jesus Christ in making us His dearly loved children. Now, I'm not silly enough to think that I can adequately cover this word of reconciliation in the time allotted tonight. I am going to try to leave you with a basic understanding of what this word means and how it should affect our thinking and lives.

We don't normally think of the term reconciliation very much. We use it in a couple of different ways. We reconcile the financial books of a company or organization. That is, we make sure that they have entries that offset each other and balance. We try to reconcile two factions that have opposing points of view. That is, we look for the common ground and try to get the parties to compromise on the differences to bring about a semblance of peaceful coexistence. And we try to reconcile seeming contradictions in history or other accounts of facts or events. That is, we try to figure out how both accounts can be true, yet give seemingly opposite descriptions.

But, we don't normally use reconciliation in the Biblical sense of the term. That is, two parties have something between them that is serious enough to cause them to despise each other and be angry with each other. Reconciliation would be trying to get the parties to deal with whatever is between them in order to remove it, thus leading the way in re-establishing a friendly relationship between them again.

I would like for you to use your imagination and try to place yourself into this story. It is obviously made up from my imagination. But I want you to try to make it seem real and experience the feelings that you would have if you were actually in the story as a character.

Once upon a time there lived a very rich, handsome, well-dressed, humble, thoughtful, and kind young man. Every eligible lady in town was involved in making elaborate plans, with the help of their wide eyed mothers, to try to get this young man to notice them and be attracted to them.

In this same city there was a young lady who was very poor and went unnoticed by everyone. But underneath her poverty and obscurity, she possessed an attractiveness that was absolutely radiant and was evident to everyone with whom she had contact. She seemed to be a perfect lady, except for her poverty.

Now, I could make this story last for the length of a novel, but let's hurry up and get to the juicy parts. This handsome, rich young man takes this poor, radiant, attractive young lady as his wife. She is totally dependent on him for everything that she needs and has. After all, she was very poor, remember.

Their marriage seemed to be something that was made in heaven. They were so in love and seemed to be totally committed to each other.

Then one day, the husband came home to an empty house. He called for his wife, but there was not answer. He went into each room in search for her, but she was nowhere to be found. He had the maid fix him his dinner, but he hardly touched it. Where could she be? There wasn't even a note left behind.

He called the police later that evening to report that she was missing. They only told him that she would have to be missing for 3 days before she could legally be reported as missing. They asked if he had checked with all of her relatives and the places that she normally went. And of course, he had done so several times.

He went to bed, but he couldn't sleep. Where was the love of his life?! That sleepless night turned into colorless days and more sleepless nights. Several weeks passed, but there was no sign of her anywhere. One day his accountant called him to let him know that there was a clue about his wife's disappearance. He was reconciling the bank statements and found out that there was \$100,000 missing. It had been withdrawn in cash on the day of his wife's disappearance. Perhaps she was kidnapped; tortured for money, and then left somewhere dead. This was not good news, but at least it was some news.

Then one day several weeks later, a road detour on his normal route home routed him through a very rough and dark part of town. Wait! That lady lying on the sidewalk. Why, she looked like his beloved. Oh, but how could it be?! He jerked the car to a stop and just barely parked it out of the way of traffic amid horns honking and drivers cursing. He jumped from the car and ran toward that lump of humanity that was lying motionless on the sidewalk. He knelt down and gently picked her up. He stared into her face. Was it she? Was it his beloved who had been gone for so long? He pushed the hair out of her face in order to get a better look and, yes, it was his beloved! But, oh, how dirty and smelly she was. She reeked of stale beer, dirty sweaty clothes, and body odor that evidenced no personal hygiene for a very long time. What happened? All kinds of scenarios raced through his mind. But he was not prepared for what happened next.

His wife awoke from her drunken stupor and smiled her typical angelic smile. "Hi, honey", she said with slurred speech. "Am I ever glad to see you! I need some more money. I'm having a great time with all my new friends and lovers, but I'm a little short of cash."

About at that same time, a man driving a new Mercedes Benz, dressed in very fine clothes stopped at the curb and came up to the husband. He grabbed his wife and jerked her from her husband's loving embrace. He demanded, "Buddy, you better have lots of money. This is my best woman." After coming to his senses, her husband asked the man how much it would take to buy her from him. The amount was astronomical! But her husband paid the man, picked up his wife, and carried to his car.

He took her home. He cleaned her up. He dressed her in extravagant clothes. He took her to the doctor. He cared for her every want and need. What he found out was that she wanted to live her life her way. She wanted to come back to him when she had need, but she didn't want him to interfere with her life in any way. She was having way too much fun.

Well, this cycle of cleaning her up, coming home to an empty house, having cash withdrawn from the accounts, and finding her being the property of another man living in the most awful of sins continued for months. Each time he took her back and each time she took what she could get from him and left for her life of sin and debauchery.

Now, how would you feel if you were the husband? Would you be angry? Would you finally get to the point of having nothing to do with her? Would you not be able to be in the same room with her? Would you despise the very sight of her? Would you wish she were dead?

But better yet, what would it take for you to be reconciled with her? That is, what would it take for you to no longer be angry at her? What would it take for you to not count her awful treatment of you against her in any way? What would it take for you to once again live with her in that sweet, innocent love you enjoyed at the beginning of your marriage? Is that even possible?

## Summary of Reconciliation

I just used the term “to be reconciled with her”. I’m not sure that any of us would even be willing to consider being reconciled with a wife like that. But in the more important and eternal sense, what does it mean that God is reconciled to us?

### Definition

Let’s begin by defining the word reconciliation.

Charles Horne defines reconciliation as “a work of God in Christ whereby He removes the ground of His holy alienation from the sinner and thus does not impute their trespasses against them.”<sup>1</sup>

John Walvoord says “Reconciliation is properly the work of God for man in which God undertakes to transform man and make possible and actual his eternal fellowship with a holy God.”<sup>2</sup>

And in *Bitesize Theology*, your textbook for the class Chad is teaching in the morning, the author, Peter Jeffery, defines reconciliation as “When two people are in hostility they need to be reconciled. We are reconciled to God when our sin, which causes hostility, is dealt with. Reconciliation replaces hostility with peace.”<sup>3</sup>

So what we have is God who has been alienated from us because of our sins. Reconciliation is at God’s initiative and is God’s work of taking away the sin that separates us from him, making it possible for us to be at peace with him.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles M. Horne, *Salvation*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 40.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 178.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology*, (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2000), 101.

## Description

I would like to use two other quotes to describe what reconciliation is. The first is from J. I. Packer and he states in his book *God's Words*:

“Reconciliation means the ending of enmity and the making of peace and friendship between persons previously opposed. God and men were at enmity with each other by reason of men’s sins; but God has acted in Christ to reconcile sinners to himself through the cross. The achieving of reconciliation was a task which Christ completed at Calvary. In virtue of Christ’s finished work of atonement, God now invites sinners everywhere to receive the reconciliation and thus be reconciled to him. Believers enjoy through Christ an actual reconciliation with God which is perfect and final.”<sup>4</sup>

The second quote is from John Murray, a theologian from the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He says in his book *Redemption – Accomplished and Applied*:

“Reconciliation presupposes disrupted relations between God and men. It implies enmity and alienation. This alienation is twofold, first, our alienation from God and second, God’s alienation from us. The cause of the alienation is, of course, our sin, but the alienation consists not only in our unholy enmity against God but also God’s holy alienation from us. Our iniquities have separated between us and our God, and our sins have hid his face (Is. 59.2). ... “Reconciliation presupposes a relation of alienation and it effects a relation of favour and peace. This new relationship is constituted by the removal of the ground for the alienation. The ground is sin and guilt. .. The removal is brought about by the vicarious work of Christ, when he was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Christ took upon himself the sin and guilt, the condemnation and the curse of those on whose behalf he died. This is the epitome of divine grace and love. It is God’s own provision and it is his accomplishment. God himself in his son has removed the ground of offense and we receive the reconciliation.”<sup>5</sup>

## Development Throughout Scripture

As we have seen, the fact that God must be reconciled to us means that there must be enmity between us and alienation from us. How is this developed in the Scriptures? I would like to give credit to Chad Bresson for helping me with these insights that I am going to present right now.

### Old Testament

We could spend a great amount of time doing a survey of the Scriptures seeing the development of this theme of alienation and separation from God and His plan for reconciliation, but I can only do a quick overview of some key points tonight.

We don’t have to go very far from the front cover of our Bibles to discover that there is enmity and alienation. Turn with me to Genesis chapter 3. You know the story of Adam

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<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, *God's Words*, IVP, 126.

<sup>5</sup> John Murray, *Redemption – Accomplished and Applied*, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1955), 33,42.

and Eve listening to Satan and disobeying the direct command of God. They ate the fruit and they immediately knew that they were naked. They knew the shame of sin. And they made coverings from fig leaves to try to cover over this separation that had taken place. As God pursued Adam and Eve, the sins begin to multiply. Beginning with Adam, they begin to blame shift. And in verse 15 we have the first mention of enmity and the first hint of the future reconciliation.. <read verse>. But the ultimate statement of alienation from God is found beginning in verse 22. (read 22-24>. Here is the cherubim who is guarding the tree of life with a flaming sword. There is no entrance to a holy God from a sinful human being. God has been alienated from those He created in His own image. Turn with me to Isaiah 59.1. <read verse> We are separated from God because of our sins. There are more instances of God's alienation from us that we find in the Old Testament, but I don't have the time to go over them tonight.

## New Testament

Let's proceed to the New Testament. Let's begin in a very familiar portion of Scripture, especially at this time of year. Luke chapter 2. I will begin reading at verse 8. <read 8-14>. Look at this proclamation to the shepherds again. "and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" We have the beginning of the promised reconciliation for man. He is going to bring peace where there is no peace between God and man.

Chad spoke this morning about the use of the prefix re in regeneration. If you will notice, there is the prefix re on reconciliation. When God created mankind, we were created in perfect harmony and a perfect relationship with God. God came and walked in the garden with his image-bearers. He talked with them. He had sweet fellowship with them. There was nothing between God and his ultimate creation, not even clothing. There was nothing that separated God and mankind. But then sin entered the picture and God separated himself from man. He placed the angel to guard the tree of life with the flaming sword, but he promised that there would be coming One who would reconcile Him to his creation. And now this promised reconciler has come. He is bringing peace on earth between a God who has been alienated from this sinful people. He is once again going to be in perfect harmony with his children.

And then we have the ultimate picture of alienation and separation between God and our sin when Jesus hung on the cross. Turn back to Matthew 27 starting at verse 45. <read 45-46>. Here is the ultimate separation. God has completely separated Himself from His son as He places the sins of the whole world on Jesus. Can you imagine a more awful situation than this: the perfect harmony and community of the Trinity is torn in two as Jesus bears our sins and has his father turn his back on Him and forsake Him? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Is there a more desperate description of the awful separation that sin has made between us and God? This is the ultimate picture of enmity and alienation between God and man. And what happened was Christ passed through that flaming sword that God had placed at the tree of life in the garden. He did what God required and bore the penalty that our sins deserved. He was slain to bring about our reconciliation.

## Implications of Reconciliation

By now I hope that you are sensing the importance of having a Holy God be reconciled to us, his sinful creation. So let's take a look at two of the main passages in Scripture that deal with this word of our salvation – reconciliation – and make some quick observations.

### Romans 5:6-11

Please turn to Romans 5:6-11. <read text>

In verse 6-8 we see that we were utterly helpless and weak. God loved us supremely even while we were enemies and sinners. Reconciliation is totally God's work through Christ.

In verse 10, our reconciliation was procured by the death of Christ. It was only through His death that we could be reconciled.

In verse 11, we receive reconciliation as a free gift. It is the free grace of God by which we receive the removal of alienation from God and acceptance into His favor.

This entire passage teaches that even though we were enemies in God's sight and He had alienated Himself from us because of our sin, He still provided for His own reconciliation through the ultimate price, the death of His Son.

### 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

In verses 18 & 19, we again see that this is a work of God. It is nothing that we do or can do. It begins with God and is totally accomplished by God.

Also in verses 19 and 20 we see that the change that happens in our hearts can only happen because God has reconciled us to Himself. If there was no reconciliation, there could be no change in us.

Then look at the tenses of the verbs in verses 18,19 and 21. They are in the past tense.. Reconciliation is a once-for-all one time event, an accomplished fact, a finished work.

And in verse 21, the ground for our reconciliation is the imputing of our sins to Christ. We are totally weak and helpless to do anything to deal with the sin that alienated God from us.

## Applications of Reconciliation

I would like to take the time to make a number of practical applications. But I am only going to make one application. Please turn to Matthew 5 and we will read at verse 23. <read 23-24>. Christ teaches that we are to be reconciled to our brother. We have great difficulty in doing this. We have great difficulty in doing this with our spouses, much less with someone other than our spouses.

Every Monday, I meet with couples who are unwilling to be reconciled to each other. They cannot give up their own desires and demands of the other in order to be reconciled. To deal with the issues that are separating them would take humility and grace and mercy. They are not going to do the hard work of doing that.

We are given the ultimate example of what it means to be reconciled by what God has done for us. He is the one who has been alienated from us, and yet He is the one who provided reconciliation for us, his enemies and sinners against Him. The excuses that we use for not being reconciled pale in comparison to what it cost Him to reconcile us to Him.

## **Conclusion**

Let me see if I can wrap this all up. Remember my story that I told at the beginning of this message. Remember how angry you probably felt toward that wife. Remember how unfair and undeserved the behavior that husband received was. Remember how despicable that wife was. Could her husband ever be reconciled to her? Was there anything that she could do to bring about reconciliation?

How could that wife possibly repay her husband for all that she has taken and done. Remember, she was a pauper and nothing that she had was her own. All that she has belongs to her husband and has been provided to her by her husband.

This is the way that it is with us and God. We cannot offer anything to Him that could deal with the sin and rebellion we have shown. We are paupers with nothing to offer. God is the one who has paid it all and provided what is needed.

We have been redeemed from the slave market of sin. God provided His Son to pay the ultimate price to purchase us from that slave market of sin.

God's wrath has been propitiated. The wrath of God against sin has been propitiated by the death of His Son. The wrath that was ours was placed on Him.

And God's alienation from us has been reconciled. The awful sin that has separated us from God has been dealt with. The sin has been paid for by Christ and God is now reconciled to us.

Hallelujah! What a Savior. What grace and mercy that God would redeem us, would be propitiated toward us, and would be reconciled to us – His enemies and rebels!