

RECONCILIATION TOWARD MAN
(Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:20)

The New Testament doctrine of reconciliation is of major importance. The Greek word *katallasso*, translated *to reconcile*, has but one meaning, namely, *to change completely* (Romans 5:10; 11:15; 1 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20-21).

There are two aspects to the doctrine of reconciliation. These two aspects are best revealed in **2 Corinthians 5:19-20.** In verse 19 it is declared that the world (*kosmos*, which is never by any stretch of the imagination or exegesis made to represent the elect who are saved out of it) is reconciled to God.

This passage presents the truth that in and through the death of Christ on the cross, God was *changing completely* the position of the world in its relation to Himself. **The Bible never asserts that God is reconciled.** If anyone would suppose that God changed completely His own attitude toward the world because of Christ's death, we should remember that it is His righteousness which is involved. Before Christ's death His righteousness demanded its required judgments; but after His death, that same righteousness is free to save the lost. Therefore, His righteousness is not changed, nor does it ever act otherwise than in perfect harmony with His eternal righteousness.

Therefore, God who sees the world *changed completely* in its relation to Himself by the death of Christ, is not Himself reconciled or changed. See also Romans 11:15 for the same point. There is in the cross an outward appearance of a changed attitude on the part of God, but this change belongs to propitiation rather than to reconciliation.

We must remember, God is immutable! He is always righteous, right and good. Propitiation does not, somehow, infuse compassion into God; on the other hand, it releases His freedom to exercise His unchanging compassion apart from any restraints.

It is claimed by some that for God to adjust the world in its relation to Himself, as is accomplished in the reconciliation aspect of Christ's death, is **universalism.** It is assumed by these individuals that general reconciliation is equivalent to general salvation. To avoid this conclusion, these people assert that **Christ died only for the elect.** The elect, **alone,** were changed completely in their relation to God, they declare.

However, the apostle declares in verse 20 that Christ's messengers, to whom is committed the **word of reconciliation,** are to go forth, in His stead, beseeching those who, according to verse 19, are already reconciled, to be reconciled to God. The term *beseech* implies that they may or may not be reconciled in response to the messengers. What is it specifically that men are implored to do? It is simply this: God is perfectly satisfied with the solution to the sin question as finished by Christ in His death, and the sinner is urged to be satisfied himself by faith with that which satisfies God.

Therefore, faith must be present, and it is never absent when the salvation of men is in view. It becomes crystal clear, then, that whatever *complete change* is indicated – for the *kosmos*, according to verse 19, is not equivalent to the saving of anyone – elect or non-elect – it has made the reconciliation of verse 20, which is equivalent to salvation,

possible. The unregenerate are saved when they individually elect to stand by faith in relation to God through the death of Christ.

In other words, the value of Christ's reconciling death is not applied to the believing sinner at the time of His (Christ's) death, but rather *when* he (the sinner) believes.

This *twofold reconciliation* – that of the world and that which is applied when the individual believes – is found also in Romans 5:10-11. In the first instance, the death of Christ is said to reconcile “enemies” to God, which corresponds to the reconciliation of the world (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19); in the second instance, “*being reconciled*” by a personal faith as well as by Christ's death, the saved are to be kept saved by Christ's living presence as Advocate and Intercessor in heaven.

There can be no question about the fact that there are two aspects of reconciliation: one wrought for all by God in His love for the world, and the other wrought in the individual who believes, *when* he believes.

Prepared by:
Vince Morris

A general and limited illustration of RECONCILIATION (by William R. Newell, Romans, pp. 171-72):

“Suppose I am a master of a school, and I make a rule that there is to be no profane swearing. I write that rule on the blackboard, and the whole school sees and hears it, The penalty I announce too: there is to be a whipping if any one breaks the rule.

Now there is a boy named John Jones in my school, a boy I am fond of. At recess-time he swears. Everybody hears him; I hear him; everybody knows I hear him. When I call the school to order, all the scholars are looking at me to see what I will do.

I have a son of my own in that school room, a beloved son, Charles. I call him and we go outside to counsel, while the school waits. I say, ‘Son, will you bear John Jones’ whipping for him? He doesn’t believe that I love him. He thinks I hate him because he has broken my rule. There must be a whipping. I must be true to my word, but you know how I love John.’ My son says, ‘Yes, father, I’ll do anything for you that you wish. And I love John Jones too.’

I bring my boy, Charles, out before the whole school, and I say, ‘This is John Jones’ whipping I am giving to my son, Charles. The law of the school was broken by John Jones. I am putting the penalty on my boy. He says he will gladly do this for me, and for John.’ Then I whip my son, Charles; and I do not spare him. I whip him just as if he were John Jones, just as if he had broken the rule himself.

When the whipping is over, I say to some scholar, ‘Go and tell John Jones I have nothing against him – nothing at all. And ask him to come and give me his hand.’ This breaks John Jones up, and he comes forward in tears and says, ‘I didn’t know you loved me that much! I thank you from my heart!’

Now he is reconciled from *his* side to *me*. But you see I *reconciled* him to myself *first*. I had to deal with his disobedience, *or be myself unrighteous.*”