

Reconciled To Be His Child

When I was growing up, my dad and I often had talks. (Rather, he talked and I listened--he always asked me when I was going to stop listening and start talking during our talks.) These talks came at many times. They came when he had something that he wanted me to know, when I got into trouble, and when situations needed to be discussed. I always valued what Dad had to say to me. He often made the point of saying how important our talks were and that the relationship that we had stayed strong by them. He often compared a bad relationship to splitting wood. When you split wood, you start with a whole tree. First, you cut off a limb or cut down the entire tree. Next, you break the tree down into smaller logs. After you have broken the tree into the logs, you begin splitting them. To do so, you use a wedge and a hammer. You can dig into the wood with an ax to make a resting spot for the wedge to sit in. Then you place the wedge in the crevice and begin to hammer away at it. Soon the log would be broken into two pieces. This is what happens to a failing relationship. An initial circumstance makes room for a wedge to get into the relationship. As time goes by, the wedge is hammered on until it breaks the log into two pieces unless the problem is dealt with. Just as the log breaks into two after a while, a relationship that is not taken care of will break.

Sometimes, a broken limb can be repaired. There is a process known as grafting that can repair a broken limb or splice it onto a different tree to make a new species. This is the work of reconciliation--a grafting of us to God.

Since the fall of man in the garden of Eden, man has had a split in his relationship with God. Since then, man has been in need of reconciliation with God. Vincent Taylor describes reconciliation as "God's act in restoring men to fellowship with Himself" and "the healing of broken relationships."¹ Georgia Harkness defines the term a little bit more precisely: "Reconciliation is the overcoming of alienation, estrangement, hostility, and enmity through the spirit [of Christ], and it is the resulting act of friendliness, understanding, and good will."² Ralph Martin speaks of reconciliation and says ". . .the immediate consequences of being set right with God is 'peace', a term synonymous with 'reconciliation'. . .which is used to denote both restored relationship with God (so reversing and nullifying the baneful effects of sin) and 'a real participation in the life of the risen Christ'. . ."³ That is to say justification brings reconciliation which is a restored relationship with God and a continual existence in the presence and workings of Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for "reconciled" has a meaning that most would find unusual. The Greek word comes from the world of the moneychangers. The word basically means "an equal ex-

change."⁴ Donald Barnhouse explains this idea like this: he says we were "helpless, ungodly sinners." "God sets Himself up as a banker in the market place and calls out to sinners, 'Change your money here! Change your money here! I will give my power for your helplessness! I will give my godliness for your sinfulness! I will give my love for your enmity!'"⁵ Jesus is calling out to each of us saying trade me your weaknesses for what I have for you. This is how God cries out for us to be reconciled to Him.

But how was reconciliation made possible? First of all we must understand as Vincent Taylor put it, reconciliation was God's act, not our own. We can either take it or leave it. It was also not for His benefit--rather for ours. God took the initiative to make a way back into His presence for mankind. The way God made this possible was by sending His Son Jesus to earth to die for the sins of mankind.

It is Jesus then that continues the plan of reconciliation. Jesus serves eternally as our advocate and High Priest. Herman Hoyt puts this process plainly when he says, "Reconciliation resulted when Christ died for us as enemies. But now as His own, His high priestly ministry will carry us through to the end."⁶ In other words, Jesus made a way before to be reconciled to Him for our past sin and He continues to make a way for us to reconcile ourselves to God for our present sins!

When I was in middle school, my best friend was David Dyer. We did everything at school together. We looked alike, too--people thought that we were brothers. One time, for a reason I can't remember, we got into an argument that resulted in the two of us not speaking to each other. This must have lasted for several weeks. I was bound and determined not to speak to him no matter what. In my pride, I wouldn't back down from what I thought. Being the good Christian kid that I was, I snubbed him every chance that I got. Then one day, David decided to reach out to me and begin our friendship again. David did something that let me know that he was forgiving me for what I had done and letting me come back and be his friend. Suddenly, it was no longer important for me to be right or for me to have my pride. I was David's friend again and that was all that mattered. We never had another argument like that one. In fact David stuck with [?] through some of the hardest times of my life during the next several years. This is like what happened between God and mankind. The difference is that all the blame is on mankind's part. God is totally innocent and just. We wouldn't and couldn't come back into His fellowship without His help and initiative. By sending His Son God made it possible for us to on His side again. Once there, it is no longer important for us to be right or have our own pride. And God will always stick with you.

Some of us need reconciliation in our lives. Most of us here in this class have been reconciled to God as far as salvation goes. However, there are portions of your life that you just haven't let God take control and reconcile to Himself. These are areas you and I have cut God off from. How often have we said we'd do anything for God and then wouldn't give help to someone we didn't like. This is an area that we haven't let God reconcile to Himself. I'm often guilty of not waiting on the Lord. When I want things done sometimes I just do them in the best way I see fit. This isn't always wrong, but sometimes if we would just let God lead us, there would be a better way. Some of us need reconciliation in areas such as our speech, our actions, our motives, and our thoughts. All of these can be surrendered to God and reconciled to Him because of Jesus' death on the Cross.

There is a bumper sticker that I really like. It says "Visualize Whirled Peas." It's a slam against the other bumper sticker that says "Visualize World Peace." There are two main reasons that I like this bumper sticker. For one it makes fun of the new age idea that "we can work it out in ourselves if we just work hard enough." It also, to me, embodies what your efforts get you without the hand of Jesus on something--whirled peas (that is a mess!) Because of reconciliation through Jesus, our lives went from being a mess to being something. They went from being nothing to

being God's child. With God's presence in our lives, we aren't resolved to nothingness. Jesus made it possible for us to be God's children.

With this in mind and the idea that I told of at the beginning of the sermon about the wedge used to split wood, consider what the wedges are in your life that are tearing at your relationship with God. Is it something that you are consciously not handing over to God to let Him reconcile to Himself? Is it a personal problem? Think of what these problems are in your life.

Now, remember what I told you about trees being grafted? Well, let Jesus be the grafter who grafts you together with God. Give him your wedges, your problems. He will pull them out of the way and mend your relationship with God. He will make your life a whole new thing. It will be something new and special for you if you will just give in to Him.

All that you have to do is to let Jesus do the job that the Father gave to Him and let God be Father. Because God is shown as a father, you are His child. He wants to protect you and nurture you in every way possible. That is the nature of the Father. He wants to reconcile you to Himself and perfect you to the uttermost as you let Him. In doing so, you will be reconciled to be His child. You have a Father that wants the best for you and He sent your big Brother to help you get there. That is the wonder of the God you serve--He makes a way and provides an escort. For those

of you who have been struggling with a certain problem, I want us all to pray for you. You don't have to tell anyone; just lift your hand. Ask God to help you to give up the problem to Him and let Him reconcile yourself to Him.

NOTES

¹Vincent Taylor, The Epistle to the Romans, (London: Epworth, 1962), p. 14.

²Georgia Harkness, The Ministry of Reconciliation, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), p. 11.

³Ralph P. Martin, Reconciliation: A Study in Paul's Theology, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), p. 147.

⁴Donald Grey Barnhouse, God's River, vol. 4, Exposition of Bible Doctrines, Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959), p. 198.

⁵Barnhouse, p. 200.

⁶Herman A. Hoyt, The First Christian Theology: Studies in Romans, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 70.

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