

Reconciliation

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[0:00] This week, we take one more of God's words from Packer's book, and the word is reconciliation. And I trust you can see the point of that.

This will help introduce us to our study of the peacemaking church, as our reconciliation with our fellow man is to be patterned after and to bear the redemptive spirit of God's reconciliation with sinful man through Christ.

So reconciliation is our word, to reconcile. Now, those words reconcile and reconciliation are not found often in Scripture, and it's only the Apostle Paul that uses those words in relationship between God and man.

And yet there are many other words that speak of that idea of reconciliation. The Bible talks often of making peace. That's the language of reconciliation. And so Packer argues for the importance of this word reconciliation in this way.

It is not too much to say that to Paul, reconciliation was the sum and substance of the gospel. The very heart, the very sum of the gospel is reconciliation.

[1:17] For Paul, this word describes the central fact of the Christian message, so much so that he refers to the gospel as the word of reconciliation.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. I think this passage is so critical to our study, and it uses our word many times that perhaps it's just best to read it before we go any further.

And that's 2 Corinthians 5. And we'll just drop in at verse 19. Having spoken of the new creation of being in Christ, verse 18, 2 Corinthians 5.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

[2:30] We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, in the time of my favor, I heard you. And in the day of salvation, I helped you.

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. So in this passage, Paul refers to the gospel as the word of reconciliation.

He refers to the preaching of the gospel as the message or the ministry of reconciliation. And he sums up the message of the gospel in this way. That God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

And the response that's demanded of sinners in the gospel is to be reconciled to God. To receive this reconciliation.

[3:40] Reconciliation. So to understand this word reconciliation, or it is to understand this, is crucial to our understanding of the gospel. So we'll break it down into several sub points.

First, what's the meaning of reconciliation? Reconciliation. And the root word in the Greek carries the idea of change. Change or exchange. And in this context of reconciliation, it speaks of a change in our relationship.

A change from enmity to friendship. It means to bring together again two parties that have had a falling out. To bring them together.

To change their relationship. To reconcile them. To replace alienation and hostility with peace and goodwill.

For Senators Obama and Clinton to run on the same ticket, there will need to be some reconciliation, won't there? Because in the primary, there has been this offense given to each other. [4:47] And offenses taken. And so there has been this hostility and enmity that must be overcome in some way. If there is to be friendly relations.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 7, where we see this idea in the marriage relationship. 1 Corinthians 7, 10 and 11.

To the married, I give this command. Not I, but the Lord. A wife must not separate from her husband.

But if she does, she must remain unmarried. Or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

So for some reason, the woman wants to leave her husband. She's told, you must not. You must not. But if you break God's command, the command of the Lord, as Paul says, there is still something binding upon you.

[5:52] And that is, you must not marry. But you must be reconciled to your husband. So there was some reason that she left her husband.

There was some cause for her attitude being so turned against him that she would depart from him. And she must come back to him. That cause of enmity between her and her husband must be dealt with, removed, and replaced with goodwill and peace.

So in human relationships, reconciliation always supposes hostility, at least on one side or the other.

Sometimes it's both. And if the hostility is on both sides, then that hostility must be removed on both sides before true peace can be established.

So, reconciliation, to bring together again two parties that were at odds, from hostility to friendship.

[6:57] But let's consider then the divine relationship. And this is where Paul uses this word to describe our relationship to God. Let's think about God's relationship with sinners in the Bible.

On which side, here you have the two parties, God and sinners. On which side is the enmity? Not a trick? Pardon? Okay, man's side.

What do you see in man? Hostility against God. Okay. Is that the end of the problem? I see a no. Why not?

What's God's attitude towards sinners? God has a problem with sin. So God, too, has a problem with sin, doesn't he? He has an enmity toward those who have broken his law.

So that's the picture of the Bible concerning the need for reconciliation. That there's a problem on both sides of the equation.

[8:01] Let's look at them one at a time. The estrangement is mutual. First of all, man. Turn to Colossians 1. And we could turn up many passages, but this one is in the very context of speaking of Christ making peace.

Let's go back to verse 20. God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ.

And then verse 20 of Colossians 1. And through him, that's through Christ, to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight without blemish and free from accusation.

So here Paul speaks of those whom God has reconciled to himself. How does he describe them? They are those who had this enmity in their minds.

[9:15] They were enemies in their minds because of their evil behavior. Their attitude toward God was enmity. Their whole mindset was to think of God as an enemy.

Sin. So sin is at the bottom of the cause of man's estrangement and alienation from God.

Remember when sin entered the world that Adam and Eve first then began to hide from God.

Because sin brought guilt, brought fear, brought a sense of estrangement and alienation from God and even turned into bitter hostility and blaming of God.

It was through sin that this alienation began in the human race. And this enmity runs deep within the very nature of fallen man.

Kathy referred to man's hostility toward God. Indeed, that's what Paul says in Romans 8, 7. That the sinful mind, again, it's a whole mental outlook. The sinful mind is hostile toward God.

[10 : 24] It's enmity toward God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. So it's opposed to God and his son, his laws, his ways.

And that anti-God attitude is rooted in his very nature. It's who he is as fallen sinner. His heart, his mind, his will, it's all anti-God.

Enmity. So fallen man, by definition, hates God, whether he's ever admitted that or not. And don't wait for sinners to admit that. They will not admit that.

But Romans 8, 7 makes it very clear that that is the case with every one of us as we come into the world. And until God in Christ reconciles us to God, that sinners hate God.

Now, they show it in different ways. But that's the bottom line. Now, that means then that something most drastic has to take place if man is ever to be reconciled to God.

[11 : 25] That change that is the word reconciliation, that change has got to change the very nature of the beast, of who he is. It's got to enter into his heart.

But we saw that the problem is not only one-sided now. So let's go to the other side of the equation. What about God? We saw that he has issues with sinful men as well.

Look at Romans 5 and verse 10 for this side of the equation. We could back up to verse 9. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

For if when we were God's enemies, we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. We were God's enemies. We were God's enemies.

[12 : 32] Not only was God our enemy and we thought of him as our enemy. This passage tells us that we were God's enemies and God thought of us as his enemies.

Ephesians 2 and verse 3 tells us that we were by nature objects of wrath.

By very virtue of our makeup as fallen sinners, we are obnoxious to the wrath of God. We've transgressed his law. Again, the issue is sin.

Man's rebellion against him. And so not only was God our enemy, we were his enemies. We were the objects of his divine hostility. And it's not just in man that this hostility runs deep.

His wrath against the sinner runs deep, too. It's rooted in his very nature. God is holy. And part of his holy nature is to hate sin wherever it's found.

[13 : 34] God is holy. That's why he poured out his wrath on his own son when he was bearing sin. That's why he says in Psalm 7 and verse 11 that he's angry with the wicked every day.

And it's not a loss of temper as it is in man in which he acts out of character with himself. He's rather acting perfectly in accord with his character. His wrath is his holy, hot displeasure that burns against sinners for their sin.

He can't help but stand opposed to sinners. Sin is obnoxious to his being. And he cannot deny himself.

He's simply being true to who he is. So there's hostility then on both sides of the war between God and sinners. Listen to Charles Hodge, the great Princeton Seminary theologian of the past.

There is not only a wicked opposition of the sinner to God, but a holy opposition of God to the sinner.

[14 : 39] This opposition on God's side has often been denied. As if there's only man's opposition against God. That God has no qualms about man, the sinner.

And that the only problem is that man's got problems with God. The Bible simply will not measure up to that assessment. That the problem is only on man's side.

And they would tell us that this idea of God having wrath toward the sinner that must be pacified is a pagan idea.

And indeed it is. And they have seen that this runs through pagan religion, whether it's in the heart of Africa or Indonesia. Wherever it's found, you have this idea that the gods or God, the divine being, is angry.

And he must be pacified. And so we're wrong then to borrow that idea from the pagans and to import it and read it into our Bibles as if God's wrath needs to be pacified.

[15 : 52] As if he's opposed to sinners. But there's another way to interpret the fact that pagan religions have in common this sense that the divine being needs to be pacified.

That he's angry with us. And another way to interpret that fact is just to say that in this point, the pagans got it right. That God has established his court of conscience in the hearts of men, as Romans 2 says he has, so that they know that the divine being is angry with them.

And their conscience accuses them and tells them they're guilty and tells them that his anger, his wrath needs to be pacified. Now, their view of God is all askew. He's not the God of the Bible.

But my point is saying that in some ways, we can see that the pagans got it right. There is a higher being.

He is angry with us because of our sin. That's the Bible. That's not just something we've imported from pagans. And rather, we can understand why we would find it in all these different cultures.

[17:04] Because God has put his court, his voice, in the heart of men, namely the conscience. So pagan religion gets it right.

God's angry. The great error is how is that anger pacified? Well, by animal sacrifice.

By human sacrifice. By penance. By good works. By doing something. And here's the common denominator of all natural religion.

That it's something that the man does. The sinner does. To pacify the gods. And in fact, we see the damning error of all natural religion. But don't throw out the idea that God's wrath needs to be pacified.

That's biblical. A biblical thought. Any thoughts or questions on that principle. That there is wrath in God that needs to be pacified. The pagans have that much right.

[18:04] Any thoughts, questions that that stirs? All right. It's critical. Getting this right is critical to understanding the gospel right. The very makeup of Paul's letter to the Romans makes this clear.

That before Paul takes up the good news of reconciling mercy, he first lays down the bad news of enmity and of God's wrath. Romans 1:18. The very introduction of this gospel.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. So the problem that makes the gospel absolutely necessary is that men are opposed to God in their sin and that God is opposed to sinners in his righteousness, in his holiness.

The opposition of both rises from their very natures. God's holiness, man's sinfulness. So the prospects don't look real good, do they?

It looks like irreconcilable differences if ever there was such. Because it's rooted in their very natures. The holy God, the sinful man. But it's in that dark context then that Paul launches into his exposition of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

[19:20] So we come in third place then to the making of reconciliation. How does God make reconciliation, make peace? And reconciliation does mean peacemaking.

How is it that peaceful relations have been established between God and some sinners? Packer uses three key words to explain the process.

The first is sacrifice. A sacrifice of Christ. We saw it in Colossians 1 and verse 20. By making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

And verse 22. He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death. Romans 5:10. And when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son.

Now that was hinted at all the way through the Old Testament. That it would take the blood of a sacrifice to forgive sins. To remove the guilt, blood must be shed.

[20:22] The great offense between God and man is sin. And to remove it, a sacrifice is needed. That was pointing to Christ. Second word, propitiation. Propitiation. And that's the word that means to pacify God's wrath.

To placate it. To satisfy it. To turn it away from us. So that it's no longer on our heads. And that's what Paul says in Romans 5.

And verses 9 and 10. For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son. And he speaks in verse 9 of being saved from God's wrath.

How were we saved from God's wrath? It was through the death of his son. So that this big word, Bible word, propitiation is really just the effect. The reconciling effect of Christ's sacrifice.

God's wrath would have fallen on me forever. But Jesus Christ stepped in between and took it himself. That it might be turned away from me.

[21:23] And I might escape the wrath of God. It was a couple months ago when I saw the President Bush honoring a fallen Marine. I believe it was Iraq or Afghanistan perhaps.

And the soldier or the Marine threw himself on a live grenade. Incoming grenade. And he took the full force of it himself and thereby had saved the lives of his comrades.

And he was being honored and rightly praised. And that from the President to his parents. They only survived the wrath of that enemy.

Because someone stepped in and took the full wrath himself. And that's a picture of propitiation. This hostility in God against sin. It's not just easily diverted.

Something had to take place. The Son of God had to himself. Take the full force of that wrath. If it was to be turned away from us.

[22 : 29] That's propitiation. I will heal their waywardness and love them freely. How? For my anger has been turned away from them.

Hosea 14 in verse 4. And it will take the New Testament to fully unpack. Just how God's anger would be turned away from us. That God might love us freely.

And no longer have any wrath against us. It would be by Christ assuming that wrath himself. The Messiah absorbing it instead of us. That's propitiation.

Sacrifice. Propitiation. And thirdly, substitution. Notice it in our passage, 2 Corinthians 5. It's the very context of reconciliation that he talks about.

This great substitution that's taking place. He's just said in 2 Corinthians 5.19 That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.

[23 : 24] Not counting men's sins against them. Well, how is that? How is it that God is not counting these men's sins against them? He's not very holy if he's just letting them go by.

And not recording men's sins. How is it that he's not imputing our sins against us? Well, it's because he counted them against Christ. He put our sins on his account.

That's what he says in verse 21. God made him who had no sin. Christ. To be sin for us. So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So he didn't count our sins against us. Because he counted them against his own son. And then he punished him. And poured out his wrath upon him. So Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

That's the language of substitution. Sacrifice, propitiation, substitution. That's the biblical language of how reconciliation between God and sinners is turned.

[24 : 33] It happens. The process of making peace. Now, some people have so taught these things that it sets God the Father against God the Son in their holy purposes.

And you need to be careful that you never get into that situation. As if God the Son is friendly towards sinners and seeks our salvation.

That Jesus is for us and God the Father is against us.

As if the Lord Jesus has to convince a reluctant Father in heaven to be at peace with us sinners. That slanders the Father.

And we must be careful because the Bible says some things that are easily twisted to come up with this idea. But it's the Father himself who so loves the world that he sends his own son to be the savior of the world.

[25 : 38] First John 4.10. This is love. Not that we love God. But that he loved us and sent his son as a propitiation for our sins.

That's a beautiful verse because it shows God's love and God's wrath all in one breath. That God so loved us that he sent his own son to turn away his wrath from us by pouring it out on his son in our place.

And you see it. It's not the son versus the father in this. No, the father was the one who sent the son to be the propitiating sacrifice to pacify his own wrath.

God quenched, Packer says, God quenched and put away his own wrath against us. His own just wrath against us by sending his own son to atone for our sins in the darkness of Calvary.

All because of his love for his enemies. Just because you may not be able to love your enemies. Don't assume the same inability in God.

[26 : 42] He loved us. Even while we were still sinners. Enemies. Under his wrath. So we come tonight to remember this, don't we?

What it costs the Godhead to reconcile us enemies to him. Come and see. Come and look. Come and taste. Taste afresh. What it costs the Godhead to reconcile sinners to himself forever.

Well, the work of Christ is perfect. It needs nothing to be added to it. So what is the response of sinners to this reconciling word? They are to receive the reconciliation.

That's the language of scripture. Reconciliation was made by Christ's death, but it's not possessed until it is received. Received the two stages in reconciliation. Of reconciliation accomplished in the death of Christ.

And reconciliation applied. When the Holy Spirit moves upon us that we would receive this reconciliation. Both made and received. The ground of our peace is what Jesus did on the cross. [27 : 46] He did it all. The acceptance of this peace is something that we do at conversion. We run up the white flag of surrender and we receive the reconciliation. We receive the full terms of peace as they're offered to us in the gospel.

Romans 5.11. Through whom we have now received reconciliation. Look at Romans 5.1. Talks about how we receive this reconciliation.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. How do we have reconciliation? How do we have peace with God?

It's through faith. In our Lord Jesus Christ. So our reconciliation is not accomplished by working ourselves into the favor of God by anything that we do.

It's simply by receiving it. That's how we make peace with God. We receive the terms of peace. We receive the Savior of peace.

[28 : 54] His work. And here we find that the gift of reconciliation comes with the reconciler. We receive Christ. And in receiving Christ, we receive the merits of his work that brings us peace with God.

There's never the separation of Christ. The reconciler. And the gift of reconciliation. You can't just take peace with God without taking the Prince of Peace.

The gift and the purchaser are intertwined. The gift can never be separated from the giver. And so we receive reconciliation by receiving a living Savior.

Be reconciled to God is the command to sinners. Receive this reconciliation by faith in Christ. So Packer says faith both takes and gives.

This is the part of the sinner. What must he do to receive the reconciliation? Faith. It both takes and gives. It takes God's promises. He's promised peace to those who trust in him.

[30 : 01] It takes God's Son, the reconciler. It takes God's salvation. It receives it freely as a gift. And it gives itself up to God's service.

It takes the Lord as Savior. And gives itself to the Savior as Lord. And so the reconciliation is received.

And guilty sinners find peace with God. So the gospel is a message of reconciliation.

And the response on the sinner's part is to receive it by faith. Receive Christ. Now, this message, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, has been committed to us.

Now, surely Paul is speaking and he's referring to himself and the other preachers of the word. But I think we're wrong to limit this to just Paul and the official preachers of the word.

[31 : 02] Yes, they in a special way have received this ministry of reconciliation. But every one of us who has been reconciled to God has this responsibility of making known the message of reconciliation.

Think of witnessing as telling others how to be at peace with God. That's what it is. The message is how to be at peace with God. And that's what witnessing is.

You're telling your friend how to be at peace with God. They may need to know first that they're at enmity with God. What the problem is. And then they will need to know how to be at peace with God. And we need to call on them because of the sacrifice that was made 2,000 years ago.

God is willing to be at peace with sinners. Come and receive it. Come and receive him. Finished work. And we do this, Paul says, as Christ's ambassadors.

Our ambassador to China acts on our behalf to China. He's not over there just making decisions for his own personal sake.

[32 : 06] He's there representing us. And so if we're Christ's ambassadors, then whatever we're doing, we're doing as his representatives in the world. And so we're charged as his ambassadors to make this appeal to sinners.

Be reconciled to God and to know even as we're making it that Christ is making his appeal through us. So if in witnessing we are acting as Christ's ambassadors, we're standing in the place of Christ

before the world and being his mouthpieces, we must be sure of at least two things. We must be sure that we are carrying his message. I'm his ambassador. I must carry his message. It must be the faithful gospel. It must be the terms of peace that he has set forth. But I must also be careful that I am demonstrating the spirit and attitude of Christ in my witness. And what is that? I don't give the gospel with a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. I don't care. If you reject it, you'll find out later that you were wrong. And if you accept it, well, then you'll find I'm right. That's not what we have here. We have Paul saying, I implore you. [33 : 22] I beg you. I plead with you. In Christ's stead, be reconciled to God. Jesus doesn't have this take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

He has this great willingness to receive sinners. And so if we're standing in his stead as ambassadors, we must have that same spirit about us that shows that our Christ is most willing to receive sinners.

And we want to see them saved. Our God is not irreconcilable. He has found a way in Christ that his great love and that great willingness to be reconciled to men can be expressed in a way that does not do violence to his holiness.

And so he is willing to have you come to him. That's the attitude, the spirit that we must represent Christ with. Well, what about man's enmity against God?

How is that fixed? We've talked about God's hostility and God's enmity against the sinner for his sin. And that's fixed at the cross. What about man's hostility toward God? How is that overcome and changed to love and friendship?

[34 : 34] Well, it's by the same death of Christ. It's made by the same death of Christ and it's applied by the transforming work of God's spirit in our hearts. In the new birth, Christ's death purchased the Holy Spirit to come and overcome these hearts of ours, to heal our waywardness, our God-hating hearts.

And so the new birth changes the very prevailing disposition of our heart from being anti-God to being pro-God. From hating God to loving God.

That change is radical. It's not perfect yet, but it's radical. It's changed the very direction of our mind and will and affections to being pro-God, for God, that we love God now.

And yet it's not completed. There's still a part of us, the Bible calls the flesh, remaining and dwelling sin, that's still anti-God. And we must fight against it and we must stamp on it.

We must ever be putting it to death. But it's a divine new nature. It's that seed that God has planted in us so that we will not continue in sin as before.

[35 : 42] And that change, that radical change will be perfected in life and finally made perfect when we see Christ. So God's, or the enmity on man's part and God's part is removed by the work of Christ on our behalf at Calvary and in our hearts by his spirit.

That's the great reconciliation. And our relationships with each other and our reconciliation to each other is to reflect that. That's the high calling to the children of God who are sons and daughters of the peacemaker.

To be ourselves peacemakers. He came seeking peace with us when we didn't want peace. And we must do the same.

So more of that next week, Lord willing, as we begin our new series. Let's pray and ask the Lord to bring it home to our hearts. God of peace, we see again this morning what we have come to enjoy all because of Christ.

So please make him more precious to us and fill us with your own redemptive spirit that we might be peacemakers in our world. Both calling sinners to peace with God and also peace with us.

[37 : 03] We ask for Christ's sake. Amen.