

Reconciliation!

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 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 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.

Ernest Hemingway understood something about relationships, or better, broken relationships. He wrote a short story entitled, *The Capital of the World*. The story is set in Spain and revolves around a father and his teenage son named Paco. Paco was an extremely common name in Spain at that time. Paco wanted to escape his father's control so he ran away to Madrid to become a matador. His father was desperate to patch things up with his son so he followed him to Madrid. He put an ad in a local newspaper with this simple phrase: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the Madrid newspaper office tomorrow at noon. All is forgiven. I love you."

Hemingway writes, "... the next day at noon in front of the newspaper office there were 800 'Pacos' all seeking forgiveness." Reconciliation is when two people are mad at each other, but they sit down, work it out and become friends again. The world is full of "Pacos" who yearn for reconciliation. If you could sit down with someone and patch up a difference or two, who would that be? Reconciliation is also our word today from Romans. Our text shows us how God reconciles us to himself. First we will how bad it was.

I. How bad is it?

In my experience, 9 times out of 10, or nineteen times out of twenty, when two people get into a fight, both are to blame. Ask any teacher who broke up a shoving match on the playground, or a marriage counselor, or a hockey referee. Both need to see what they did wrong, humbly apologize and forgive one another. It is rare that there is an innocent party. Things are not right between God and mankind, but there is an innocent party in this relationship. It is God. We are at fault.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Someone once said that their favorite Bible passage is, "God helps those who help themselves." There is a problem. That is not found in the Bible. It actually comes from Benjamin Franklin and his *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Franklin was a great man, but he was a poor theologian. If God's help depends on us first helping ourselves, then we would never receive any help from God. This passage explains why. We are powerless. It is the same word Jesus used to describe his disciples when he found them sleeping a third time instead of praying with him. ***"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*** How bad are things between God and mankind? We are powerless to do anything about it.

Even if we have the power to do something about, and we don't, but if we did, we wouldn't want to make things better for we are also described as "ungodly." That means without God. It doesn't say "sometimes" without God. It simply says ungodly, period. The Parable of the Lost Son describes this. He gladly took what his dad earned, his inheritance, but he didn't spend it on his dad's farm. He moved asv to a far away country and spent it all there without his father. He wanted nothing to do with his father. By nature man is like Paco, or the younger son in the story of the Prodigal Son who ultimately want nothing to do with God.

And why would we rather live without God? As our text says, ***"While we were still sinners, ..."*** God gave Adam and Eve paradise, and they threw that away because they didn't like God's one rule: don't eat this one fruit. The Bible further describes the sinner as hostile to God, who can't submit to God. God says, "Come here," and the sinner doesn't want to.

So how bad is it? It says, ***"For if, when we were God's enemies, ..."*** Our relationship with God is that of enemies. Want to see someone get really angry? Tell him or her that sinning is more than robbing banks. Tell them that jealousy is just as bad as robbing banks. Tell them their sins deserve eternal punishment. We get mad when you tell us. I remember a woman inquiring about baptism for her two year old son. When I explained why we baptize, because we are sinners needing forgiveness, she became angry. "My son is not a sinner."

It is that bad. Man is separated with God. By nature we want nothing to do with God unless we can make him say what we want him to say or do what we want him to do. We are his enemies. We are powerless to do anything about it. It is hopeless.

II. How Christ reconciles us to God.

But nothing is impossible with God. ***"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** God says he loves us. Fine. But there is an interesting phrase in this text. Notice it says, "his OWN love." He doesn't love us as the world understands love. He loves us with his own love. Paul explains it by comparing it to worldly love. He says "for a good man someone might die."

What is meant by good? Good is someone who is good to have around like a relative. It is also a person who does good to you. Many times people have died saving the lives of people close to them. On September 29, 2006, Navy Seal Michael Monsoor was fighting on a rooftop with two fellow Navy Seals and three Iraqi soldiers when a grenade landed. Michael Monsoor threw himself on the grenade and died saving the lives of those five other soldiers. Yes, many people in the world would do that. It doesn't happen every time, but it does happen.

Paul continues on how it is rare someone would die for a righteous man. A righteous man is someone who is a decent person, but he is a stranger to you. If he lives or dies really does not impact your life. Sometimes people will die for strangers, but is not as common. Many years ago a jet crashed in a river and most people stood on the banks and watched. But one man, a total stranger, jumped in and dragged one survivor after another to shore until he drowned himself. See the difference between the two? One soldier died for fellow soldiers who were fellow soldiers, but only one man out of many was willing to die to save strangers. Again, many in the world do that, even non-Christians. Now if they might do that for decent folks, do you think people would give up their lives to save enemies? Would a Navy Seal jump on a grenade to save the life of a terrorist who is shooting at him and other Seals? Certainly not.

That is worldly love. It has its limitations. But God doesn't love us with that kind of love. ***"For if, when 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!"*** God didn't wait for us to become righteous or good or to stop sinning. He didn't wait for us to surrender or crawl to him half way. While we were his enemies, warring and resisting him, he reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son. God jumped on the grenade to save those who were his enemies and not just his friends.

Reconcile means to kiss and make up, to get rid of what separates us so we can be friends. We didn't reconcile anything with God. He reconciled us to himself through of Christ. His death removes the guilt of our sins so they don't separate us from God. I see two kinds of reconciliation in this verse. Paul said, ***"... we were reconciled to him,"*** and then says, ***"... having been reconciled, shall we be saved."*** "Were reconciled" and "having been reconciled." What is the difference? Faith is the difference. Let me give you an illustration. I saw a YouTube video about an American C-47 pilot. Japan had surrendered and he was flying supplies to all these airbases in Japan. One time he landed and about 50 Japanese soldiers surrounded his plane with their weapons ready. Through a translator he found out that they did not know the war was over. It took a while, but they finally were convinced, befriended him and gave him a tour of their village.

Christ died to pay to reconcile the world to God. But many people don't know the war between them and God is over. It is as if Christ never came. But the believer knows the war is over. The believer is at peace with God and acts accordingly. That's the difference between "were reconciled" and "having been reconciled." Whoever believes will not perish; whoever does not believe stands condemned.

So we know the war is over. What does that do to our lives? ***"Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*** We rejoice. How do we rejoice? We are so happy we are reconciled we share it with anyone and everyone. We tell people how good it is to not worry about God or what will happen when we die. We will even start loving each other, not as the world loves, but with the same attitude of Christ, wanting desperately to reconcile differences between us and them, and not just for those who are good to us, but even our enemies. And we would reconcile these differences the same way God does with us: through Christ and his forgiveness. Imagine that. And we share it. When World War II ended, the news boys stood on the corners of streets announcing it. We want to do that, too.

Everything about Jesus is about reconciliation. When the angels announced his birth outside Bethlehem, they sang, "Peace on earth." When Jesus appeared to his disciples Easter night, his first words were, "Peace be to you." Without that peace through Christ, things would forever be bad between the sinner and God. Not any more. Be reconciled to your God through Christ. Amen.