

THE RECONCILIATION FACTOR

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:1; 7:2-4

How comfortable are we with having an appliance or tool that is broken or not working the way it should? A lot of us would qualify for the “If it is broken, fix it” club. Sometimes things get thrown away and replaced because the problem may be such that it can’t be fixed. If I have something that is good quality steel and it breaks because of stress, then I would weld the break and continue to use the item. If I have something that is die-cast white metal and it breaks, then I know that welding it will not work and I toss it out and find a replacement that will work.

If you have the responsibility of keeping up with your checking account, then you know the frustration that occurs if the figures you have do not agree with the bank’s numbers. Those who work on the “offering counting team” for the church know the importance of getting the checks to agree with the recorded amounts that will go into the database. We can spend a lot of time in getting the numbers reconciled.

Like appliances and numbers we may also find that sometimes our relationships do not work and trying to reconcile the differences can be challenging. A breakdown in relationships may be more difficult to repair than a broken piece of equipment. We have seen that life is about relationships and the message of the Bible is about how to keep our relationship in good repair and how to reconcile those that are broken.

Paul dealt with the issues of broken relationships in his second letter to the church at Corinth and we can learn from the approach he used. The first step is to reach out in openness, then we need to be responsive to the love of Christ, keep in mind how God reconciled the broken relationship we had with Him, and (finally) be careful to let others know that we want to bring about a healing of any breaks in relationships.

Reach Out in Openness: 5:11-13

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. ¹² We are not again commending ourselves to you but *are* giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have *an answer* for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.

¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. 2 Cor 5:11-13 (NASB95)

On July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards preached (actually read) the most famous sermon ever delivered in America. It was titled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” The results were phenomenal and it is credited with have initiated the great awakening of that era. Edwards had a profound influence on men such as George Whitefield who was instrumental in inspiring those who led the war for independence.

Paul had a burden for those who were lost because he knew the surety of the Judgment of God for all mankind. As R. G. Lee preached, there will be a “Payday, Someday.” Paul was motivated to put the love he had for others into action. The priority in Paul’s ministry was persuading people that “repentance and belief on the Lord Jesus” is the only hope any of us has in the Day of Judgment. This should be high priority in the life of every Christian. His faithfulness to what God had called him to do was evidence of his integrity, and was important to the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul knew people would be skeptical of others trying to persuade them to do anything. We are so accustomed to people operating from "hidden agendas" that it is natural for us to be wary of others. Paul had confidence that their motives were such that they were doing what God wanted them to do and for the right reasons. Paul also had hope that the people with whom he was dealing could see that his actions were motivated by love. The church in the First Century

was being confused by false teachers who were able to "put on a good show" but had no foundation in truth. Their motives were for their own personal gain and fame. Paul had hoped to give the Christians some ammunition with which to answer the challenges put forth by the false teachers who were all facade and no substance. Of course, we could make the same argument about what is happening today. There are still false teachers who think that the show they put on is more important than the truth and who are motivated by the money.

It is likely that Paul was accused of being crazy because of his beliefs that he taught. It may be that some thought he was out of his mind when he spoke in tongues or prayed for long periods of time. Some thought him to be irrational because he believed in the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection of Christ and the Second Coming of Jesus. These attitudes about the church and the idea that serious Christians are fanatical nuts are still prevalent. At other times, Paul was a powerful logician in presenting irrefutable logical arguments regarding God's Plan of Salvation. He had a spiritual side which defied human logic and another side that revealed a brilliant mind, controlled emotions and determined will. Paul knew he must relate to God from his spiritual nature (even though the unsaved would not understand) and that he had to relate to people from the rational side of his being.

Respond to Christ's Love: 5:14-16

¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. ¹⁶Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer. 2 Corinthians 5:14-16 (NASB95)

It is always good to ask yourself, "Why do I do what I do?" Paul said that he tried to persuade people because he knew what the outcome of the Judgment would be for those who were not in Christ. That leads to another question, "Why would he care that people would go to hell for all eternity?" We find the answer to that question in verse 14. The love of Christ controlled or compelled him to care. This is the same kind of love that caused God to send His uniquely begotten Son into the world. This is the kind of love that God has poured into the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit.

Did Paul have a choice – could he have just operated out of selfishness and ignored the problem? The second part of verse 14 and all of verse 15 tells us that Paul was teaching them (and us) that we really do not have a choice. If we are in Christ, then the old selfishness nature died when we believed on the Lord Jesus. Jesus died in the place of all who believe and trust in His completed work of salvation. Since He died in our place, then we are dead to self. Just as Jesus rose from death, then all who are in Him were raised to new life and have His life in them.

Paul knew and taught the reality of a "new life in Christ." If we are "in Christ" and Christ died for all, then we are also dead to the things of this world. Our new life finds its focus (imprinting) in the One Who is the Source of the new life. When we see other people, we should not be seeing them only as human beings but as also as souls for whom Christ died to save. We must view others from the threshold of eternity. Our every action should be motivated by the love that God placed in our hearts when He saved us. Just as our opinion about Jesus changed from seeing him as "a great teacher and historical figure" to that of His being the "sinless Son of God, the Savior of the world and Lord of ALL," so also our outlook on the world and people must change.

Remember God's Work in Christ: 5:17-21

¹⁷Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

¹⁸Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses

against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Cor 5:17-21 (NASB95)

If there has never been a time in your life in which you can say, "I am now a new person, in Christ," then you have some serious business you need to conduct with God. If there is any concept in the Scripture that should be interpreted literally, this is absolutely one that should. Notice what the Scripture says: It is NOT "as if" he is a new creature; it is "he IS" a new creature. Everyone who is "in Christ" has been begotten of God the Father. Jesus was the uniquely begotten of the Father but listen to what Peter tells us:

Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath **begotten us** again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). When we have become new, then everything we experience is new to us. All things are new. Every life experience takes on new meaning. We realize that we are children of God and that nothing can get through God's protective love to us unless it is for our good. We will not necessarily understand nor see the good that God intends, but we can KNOW it by faith IF we trust in His word that tells us "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to [His] purpose." (Rom 8:28) Notice Paul's use of the phrase "all things" in both passages.

Notice also the continuation of the use of "all things." *All things* are new, *all things* work together for our good, and *all things* are of God. The Source of our new life is God. It is He who took the initiative and provided a means for us to be restored to Himself. That restoration was a result of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Now that we have been restored to a right relationship with God (reconciled), we are to be about the business of leading others to discover this same restoration. Sin had caused a separation and loss of fellowship between man and God. Only God could bridge the chasm of this separation. Man's part is to simply turn to God (repent) and believe the promises that God has given. When we believe God, then God counts (imputes) that as righteousness. The other possibility is that we do not believe what God has said and then we will have our *trespasses* imputed to us.

As God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, Christ is in us reconciling the world to Himself. We are agents or ambassadors for Christ to share His invitation to all the world to come to Him and be saved.

The magnitude and quality of God's love are seen in that a Holy God became sin (took on our sin) so we might become holy (take on His righteousness) in Him. Our confession should be "I AM the righteousness of God in Christ; I AM a new creation in Him." Our actions toward others should then reflect who we ARE in Him. The sobering truth is that our lifestyle (actions) WILL reflect who we ARE in Him.

Reassure Others of Your Desires 6:1; 7:2-4

¹And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain— 2 Cor 6:1 (NASB95)

²Make room for us *in your hearts*; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. ³I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. ⁴Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction. 2 Cor 7:2-4 (NASB95)

How could anyone receive God's grace in vain? One sure way would be to simply not

believe the message that Christ had become sins for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him. False teachers in Corinth preached a message different from Paul's gospel. Some were Judaizers who denied the righteousness of God was obtained only by faith. There are still people who teach that you have to do something to be saved. If your salvation is dependent on something you do to obtain it, then it is no longer of grace, but is of works.

Another way to "receive God's grace in vain" would be to "believe it" in your mind but to not accept it in such a way that it impacts your life. This may be the situation with a lot of people who have grown up hearing the gospel. They believe it to be the absolute truth but they have never been transformed by the truth of the message. Sometimes this is described as "head knowledge" rather than "heart knowledge."

If there has been a rift in relationships between you and another person and if you know that the ultimate rift in relationships was mankind's estrangement from God that was caused by sin and you know what God has done to bring about reconciliation, then we must follow that same example. The logical next step in the reconciliation process would be to simply open your heart and receive the person with whom you have been estranged – take the initiative.

Paul reached out to the Christians at Corinth, he appealed to the love that God put in our lives as the motivation for what we do, and he reminded them that they were not who they were before they were saved because Christ took our place. If they have truly been saved, then they should be capable of being reconciled.

Paul was not making an unreasonable request in light of who the parties were involved in the rift in relationships. Paul saw himself being closely connected to them and had always looked out for their best interest and would have given his life for them. In his appeal for reconciliation, Paul continued to encourage them and to give them positive affirmation.

The bottom line that we should take away from these passages is that we have a mission and it is the same one that Jesus had. He came to reconcile a lost world to God and He has commissioned us to do the same thing. Just as He made sacrifices to accomplish His objectives, we should anticipate that sacrifices will be required of us if we are to be effective in reconciling others to God through Christ. Is this what Jesus meant when He said "I am the way" and no one comes to the Father except by Me?