

What is Reconciliation?

For it was the [Father's] good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, [I say,] whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:19-20

καταλλαγή - (n) reconciliation/change – “reestablishment of an interrupted or broken relationship”

καταλλάσσω – (v) reconcile – “the exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship”¹

When the heavens and earth were created, the Creator and creature enjoyed uninterrupted fellowship. At the fall of man, the relationship experienced a tragic crisis. No longer were Maker and man in harmonious relation. Rather, man traded holy love for hatred toward the Lord. The enmity was not merely one-way however. God too, in righteous and holy anger, burned against those who had rebelled against Him. Creation was separated from its Creator, not only by man's sin, but by God's displeasure and hatred of such sin.

For thousands of years the world functioned (or dysfunctioned, if I may) in this disorder, this chaos. But God had no intention of failing in His purposes to be glorified through and by His creation, and He had promises to fulfill. This brings us to the incarnation, and then to the crucifixion and then to the resurrection. It is here that things are put right. What once was lovely and then was stained and strained would yet shine forth again. Peace was made through the blood of the Son on the old wooden cross and all things were reconciled to Himself (Colossians 1:19-20).

What did God reconcile?

1. His people with Himself
2. His people with each other
3. His creation with Himself

His people with Himself

Romans 5:10-11 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

This first aspect of reconciliation is really the most obvious and the most attested to in related subjects (“What is Salvation?”, “What is the Gospel?”). Man, seeking to be like God, attempt a cosmic coup and was left cursed and corrupt. Therefore, God took the initiative, sending His Son to save His people.

Man's sin was paid for and God's wrath was poured out, both on the body of the Son. He bore our sins and His Father's anger in love for us; that we might be brought near to Him. Thousands of years of hostility dealt with in the act of crucifixion. Man's relationship with His Maker was reestablished as enmity was exchanged for intimacy.

His people with each other²

Ephesians 2:14-16 For He Himself is our peace, who made both [groups into] one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, [which is] the Law of commandments [contained] in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, [thus] establishing peace, and might reconcile them [Jew and Gentile] both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Collective pride has long been a part of fallen humanity's existence. From the crusades to Hitler's Holocaust, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, Western slavery, apartheid, Rwandan revolution and the slaughter in the Sudan, genocide and segregation have corrupted the world's history, highlighting our inherent disposition against those unlike ourselves.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel and her sons and daughters were set apart as holy unto the Lord. Though there were certainly provisions for relationship outside of the commonwealth, there still existed a defined ethnic boundary. The world's inhabitants were divided into two groups, Jews and everyone else. Instead of functioning as a light to draw people into relationship with the Creator, ethnic Hebrew pride led to the exclusion of any who were deemed unclean and unworthy.

At the cross, this racial distinction was set apart³ and indeed nullified. The mystery of reconciliation has now been revealed in

¹ Definitions taken from BDAG, a major Greek lexicon.

² For more information, see Robert A. Pyne, *Humanity & Sin* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), pp. 224-230.

³ Galatians 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

the gospel, that Jew and Gentile are reconciled into one body.⁴ God has indeed broken down the wall between the two.

His creation with Himself

It is all too easy for the modern believer to restrict the work of the cross to the benefits directed toward himself. At the cross, the one who has faith finds salvation and life, being reconciled to God through the blood of the Son. Surely this is true and lovely. However, the cross is not for God's people alone. Though we are crowned with glory and honor as the administrators or overseers of God's creation,⁵ we do not represent the entirety of God's redemptive plan. Indeed the world itself was subjected to futility, cursed by God through the fall of man.⁶ God's reconciliatory design is not limited to the removal of the curse of death from mankind, but is rather much more expansive in scope. In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself.

This all-encompassing reconciliation does not teach universalism – the belief that all people will be saved. The Bible clearly teaches that it is only through faith that man can and will be fully reconciled.⁷ Instead, it seeks to combat anthropocentrism – a man-centered perspective. We are not alone in this world and God's intention was not just to purchase sinners. His creation was corrupted and He has affected an effective plan to eradicate the effects of sin. This plan applies to His people, to be sure, but also to the beasts of the field, animals of the sea, birds of the air, trees of the forest, sand on the beach, air of the heavens, etc.

We believe that a proper perspective will elicit more joy and a greater desire to glorify the One Who has sent His Son to surely save the world.

Reconciliation and Related Texts in the Scriptures

- *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

Romans 5:10-11

- *For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will {their} acceptance be but life from the dead?*

Romans 11:15

- *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all {these} things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, 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.*

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

- *and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.*

Ephesians 2:16

- *For it was the {Father's} good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, {I say,} whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

Colossians 1:19-20

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⁴ Ephesians 3:4-6 *By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; {to be specific,} that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel...*

⁵ Psalm 8

⁶ Genesis 3:17-18; Romans 8:20-22

⁷ See "What Must I do to be Saved?" and "Is Christ the Only Way?"