

## [IN GOD'S IMAGE 41 - RECONCILIATION]

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***Last time we talked about the justifying work of Jesus Christ, which was necessary to satisfy the legal requirements necessary for the relationship between a holy God and His creation to be restored.***

- ◆ However, the ultimate goal of atonement is not just to satisfy the legal obligations, it's the restoration of the relationship, or at-one-ment.
- ◆ This is the point where "justification" passes over into "reconciliation."
- ◆ Jesus' incarnation (lowering Himself) and act of justification (making us right with God) has made it possible for mankind to respond to his gracious act of love.
- ◆ So now we pick up the subject of reconciliation.

***As with the rest of the story of salvation, God is the one who takes the initiative in the process of reconciliation.***

- ◆ Jesus joined us in our humanity so He could act on our behalf.
- ◆ He lived a righteous life so it could be credited to us.
- ◆ And He suffered the judgment of God against our sinfulness and imputed His righteousness to us so we could stand justified before our God.
- ◆ Justification stresses setting us right with God whereby He forgives us and imputes Jesus' righteousness to us.
- ◆ Reconciliation, on the other hand, stresses God joining us in our humanity in order to draw us back into fellowship with Him.
- ◆ We need to think of the process of reconciliation in much the same way as the process whereby Jesus justified us.
- ◆ Just as Jesus the judge stepped around the bench and assumed the position of the man judged in order to justify us, so with reconciliation, Jesus acts on behalf of sinful mankind and responds in perfect obedience as God's beloved "Son."
- ◆ So now rather than acting in His justifying capacity as the "judge," Jesus now acts in His reconciling capacity as a faithful "son" of God.
- ◆ We learned earlier how man's natural inclination since the fall is enmity towards God.
- ◆ Now, out of the midst of our fallen human condition Jesus turns man's natural enmity towards God into a son's loving response, thereby restoring fellowship with God.
- ◆ Jesus maintained this loving response even through the hell of the cross when confronted with the combined forces of evil, both human and spiritual.
- ◆ During this awful ordeal, the bond of love between the Father and Son held firm.
- ◆ Jesus lived His perfect life of loving obedience from the manger to the grave, responding to and trusting His Father every step of the way. He is in fact acting as God's beloved son in the true image of God.
- ◆ The voice from the cloud at His baptism and transfiguration was more than a nice platitude. It was God the Father acknowledging the first human to respond perfectly to His overtures of love (Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5).
- ◆ Even more incredulous is the fact that because of what Jesus has done, the Father can now say the same thing to us, "You are my beloved sons."
- ◆ ***1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!***
- ◆ Jesus has invaded our sinful humanity, defeated it and turned it back to God so that we are no longer enemies pushing God away, but sons in loving fellowship with our heavenly Father.
- ◆ Jesus through the incarnation has brought the two parties together, God, through Jesus, lovingly approaching mankind, and mankind, again through Jesus, lovingly responding.
- ◆ The barrier preventing reconciliation between the two parties has been removed.
- ◆ Peace between the two parties has been restored.
- ◆ ***Colossians 1:19-21 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.***
- ◆ So we see the enmity between God and humanity has been removed. God is no longer opposed to the sinner because of his sin, and man no longer needs to fear God's judgment.

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- ◆ Jesus by interposing Himself as the sacrificial victim accepts God's righteous judgment on our sin in order that peace can exist between the two parties.
  - ◆ But there is a second "peace" we experience as Paul goes on to say.
  - ◆ ***V.21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.***
  - ◆ Mankind, up to this point stood under God's judgment. The prospect of spiritual death for our sin is not a peaceful existence (Romans 6:23).
  - ◆ But now that Jesus has substituted Himself in our place to accept the wrath and punishment of God on our sin, the sword of Damocles no longer hovers over humanity's head.
  - ◆ It would be completely duplicitous of God to now hold us to account for our sin after He has executed the final judgment on His very own Son, let alone what it would say of God to have allowed His Son to suffer and die unnecessarily.
  - ◆ The Father will not go back on the death of His Son and therefore has nothing more to say about our sin.
  - ◆ And that is why Paul can say Christ can present us to the Father, ***holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation (Colossians 1:22).***
  - ◆ So not only is there peace between the parties, but also the forgiven party can experience the "peace of God."  
***It's important to note that Jesus through His saving substitutionary work has worked out reconciliation in both a general sense for all mankind, but also in a subjective sense so it touches each individual.***
  - ◆ It is one thing to understand God has worked out this reconciliation between the parties in a general or corporate sense as it affects all mankind.
  - ◆ If this were as far as it went, it would mean the salvation of all mankind or "universal salvation."
  - ◆ But now the challenge is to reveal this subjective reality to the individual members of mankind so they recognise and accept what Jesus Christ has performed on their behalf.
  - ◆ This is the point of decision where each individual, after a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, will either accept or reject the gift of salvation offered to them.
  - ◆ We will speak more of this later, but for now it is important to point out, a positive response to this matter is far more likely based on two important changed realities.
  - ◆ First, a complete understanding of the lengths to which God has gone in order to offer this gift, and secondarily, the natural enmity which existed in mankind's fallen nature has been defeated and turned back towards God.
  - ◆ And as God's plan for reconciliation progresses, other realities, again provided by God, come into play to facilitate a positive response.
- God will insist on this step, as true reconciliation demands a response from both parties. God has gone to extreme lengths to make it as easy as possible for us to respond to his overtures of love.***
- ◆ Notice the lengths God has gone through to bring us to this point.
  - ◆ ***Romans 5:8-11 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!***
  - ◆ This is the process of justification to bring us into legal standing with God.
  - ◆ ***V.10 For if, while 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!***
  - ◆ "His life" is talking about Jesus' saving work of reconciliation in two senses.
  - ◆ First, His perfect righteous life lived for us as the loving obedient son prior to His death, and secondarily, the risen resurrected Son, our living mediator actively drawing us into the divine relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
  - ◆ ***John 12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.***
  - ◆ Jesus' ministry of reconciliation did not cease when He returned to heaven. Although it is not always obvious to us human beings, Jesus Christ is fulfilling this prophecy and actively drawing people into relationship with Him.
  - ◆ We will talk more about this in a future session.

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- ◆ **V.11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received** (past tense) **reconciliation.**
- ◆ So through the love and grace expressed through the saving work of Jesus Christ, God has in an objective and subjective sense provided the way for reconciliation between the two parties.
- But as mentioned, true reconciliation demands a response from both parties otherwise atonement is not possible.**
- ◆ And as reconciliation, relationship and love are dependant on free-will in order for it to be genuine, the onus passes to the forgiven party to respond and accept this God-given gift.
- ◆ Cast your minds back to the story by Søren Kierkegaard of the king who lowered himself in order to win the hand of the humble maiden.
- ◆ The king can do all in His power to facilitate a positive response, but ultimately he cannot force his will upon her.
- ◆ The final choice of whether she will reciprocate in kind to his love is up to her.
- ◆ This is the position in which humanity now finds itself. Will it respond to God's act of pure love and participate in the divine act of reconciliation?
- ◆ This is a very important step in the reconciliation process.
- ◆ If the process of atonement just stopped at the legalistic aspect of "justification" where the judge is satisfied the penalty of our sin has been paid, and Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us, then there is the danger of our developing complacency to our sin and simply continuing to live in our previous lifestyle.
- ◆ It would effectively mean, we could continue in our sinful lifestyle and still escape the wrath of God.
- ◆ The goal of atonement is much more than simply making us righteous. It is all about reconciliation. It is the restoration of a personal relationship between humanity and God.
- ◆ Justification without reconciliation results in "cheap" grace. It would be the humble maiden accepting the king's overtures of love simply to enjoy the benefits of the position without a reciprocating love. It would be an empty, loveless marriage.
- ◆ God is not mocked and He will not allow the death of His Son to be mocked.
- ◆ God has gone to extreme measures to break down the barriers preventing reconciliation and will not rest until his purpose is achieved.
- ◆ The onus is in the hands of the forgiven party to accept the gift. If it is rejected it is not because God has rejected them. In point of fact, He has already taken their rejection upon Himself at the cross.
- ◆ God has chosen in Christ to love and accept sinners. If they now choose inconceivably to reject that acceptance, then they deserve the fate of the rejected.
- ◆ There is a place reserved for those who choose "rejection." It is that god-forsaken place called "hell," life cut off from a relationship with God.
- ◆ But it is not God's will for any to be assigned to this place. It is a result of their decision to reject the loving grace of God.
- ◆ God's goal is not destruction, but salvation. Salvation that results in a restored relationship with humanity sharing in the divine life of the Trinity.
- But here again, humanity is not left to himself to work up this personal response. God again takes the initiative.**
- ◆ To again quote **John 12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself**
- ◆ Through Jesus Christ, God has eternally bound himself to humanity and through the Good Shepherd; He will pursue the lost sheep to the gates of hell if necessary to restore the relationship.
- ◆ We will pick up this aspect of the reconciliation process later, but before we leave the ordeal of the cross, we need to go back and address two more important aspects of Jesus' ministry.