

Reconciliation

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Reconciliation.

What a beautiful word. It brings to mind happy scenes: relief from deep emotional pain; the flow of pent-up tears; warm hugs; mutual forgiveness; restoration; love, joy, peace. The world is full of alienation. God created us to live in happy harmony with Him and with one another. Sin--selfishness--ruins all that.

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1 NIV).

People declare war on one another: nation against nation; culture against culture; neighbor against neighbor; friend against friend; spouse against spouse; brother against brother.

Angry words. Thoughtless acts. Misunderstandings. Resentment. Pride.

We pull away to avoid being hurt again. We crawl into our box, close the lid, cut two eye-holes, and feel safe in our protective space. In our alienation we nurse our pain alone, or we share our bittersweet feelings with sympathetic ears. We are afraid to love, because love makes us vulnerable. The people we love can hurt us, and we do not want to be hurt. It is easier to avoid the risk. But we have to love to live. If we do not love, we will die--die on the inside. The only answer is reconciliation. That means taking the risk of vulnerability, of openness and humility.

So, where do we start?

Reconciliation involves a widening circle of relationships. At the center--the hub of the wheel--is our relationship with God. The first step is to be reconciled to God. That is essential, not optional. The Bible commands, "Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). The verb is imperative: "Get reconciled to God." God is the great Reconciler. He already did His part. In Jesus Christ He built the bridge to us. Now He calls us to come to Him.

From that restored core relationship, we then become reconciled to ourselves. The war between our mind (reason and conscience) and our selfish, stubborn will is over. The will surrenders to reason. Like the prodigal son, we come to ourselves--to our senses (Luke 15:17). Our inner self-alienation is over. We are whole.

Next is reconciliation to others: spouse, family, friends, neighbors, associates. We become part of "the fellowship of the reconciled."

We also become agents of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18 says that God not only reconciled us to Himself through Christ but also committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation emphasizes contacts (outreach and relationships). Verse 19 says that God has also committed to us the word (message) of reconciliation. That emphasizes content.

If we have the ministry of reconciliation (contacts and relationships) without the word of reconciliation (content), truth will not flow and reconciliation will not happen. The opposite is also true: content without contacts is "truth on ice."

For grace and truth to flow, we must have both the ministry of reconciliation and the word of reconciliation--contacts and content. Grace and truth are gifts of God to us to share with one another. We receive them freely and without merit. We share them freely and without merit.

Relationships are contact points of reconciliation. Grace and truth flow in relationships. Whenever and however believers come in contact with others, the potential is present for the flow of grace and truth.

Because believers are "the company of the reconciled," we must be examples of reconciliation. There must be no alienation among us. If we are not reconciled to God and to one another, we lose credibility and so does our message. Only the reconciled can have a ministry of reconciliation. Only a reconciled church can reach an alienated world.

So the divine command still stands: "Get reconciled to God."