

THIS IS US! – People Who Pursue Reconciliation

9/16/18 – Pastor Randy

In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

- Ephesians 2:12-16 (NLT)

Our current sermon series title is “This is Us”. This month we are focusing on what it means for the church to function as a family. Last Sunday we talked about the need for God’s family to display a culture of honor. Today’s focus is on the church as a people who pursue reconciliation.

Biblical reconciliation is the process of restoring the relationship of previously alienated parties. This passage in Ephesians 2 reveals that reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel. Verse 14 says Christ has brought “peace” to us. The peace that has been brought to us is not peace in the sense of inner calmness and tranquility. It is relational peace; the replacing of ill will with good will between alienated and hostile parties. Our broken relationship with God and others communicated by a variety of phrases such as: “living apart from Christ”, “excluded from citizenship”, “lived without God”, “far away from God”, “hostility that separated”. The reconciliation experienced through faith in Christ is also described by a variety of phrases: “united with Christ Jesus”, “brought near”, “brought peace”, “He united”, “broke down the wall of hostility”, “made peace”, “one new people from two groups”, “together as one”, “hostility was put to death”.

When most Christians think of Ephesians 2 they think about the message of salvation by grace through faith. But if I was going to pick one word to describe the heart of this chapter it would be ‘reconciliation’; the two-fold, cross-shaped reconciliation that restores man’s vertical relationship to God

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and his horizontal relationships with people. Paul described how the salvation which has rescued us from death in sin to life in Christ has not only built a bridge between the individual believer and God; it has built all kinds of bridges between believers where previously there were barriers. Sin erects barriers. Christ is the bridge builder over all human barriers.

Jesus built the bridge. But we still have to be willing to travel the span.

I. Reconciliation is a spiritual matter:

A) It is God's will! Jesus died to effect reconciliation both vertically and horizontally. Listen again to Ephesians 2:16: *Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.*

What did Jesus death and resurrection accomplish? A number of things. It provided the basis for our forgiveness and justification. It paved the way for our regeneration; we have been brought to life spiritually. It has paved the way for our sanctification; we are being shaped into the image of Christ. It has secured eternal life for us. But the ultimate blessing of Jesus' death and resurrection is that it has affected reconciliation; first between us and God and then consequentially between us and God's other children. Although there is nothing more important than you being reconciled to God, God does not allow us to limit our concern to our need of vertical reconciliation.

"So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, ²⁴ leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

– Matt 5:23,24

Jesus makes the issue of unity among his people so paramount that he teaches us that our worship of God and our relationships with others cannot be treated as separate issues. We cannot compartmentalize our worship of God and our relationships with others.

This theme runs throughout the Bible. God, speaking through the prophet Amos, rebuked the Israelites for their worship which He described as a stench to His nostrils and noise to His ears. Why did their worship smell bad and sound bad? They were involved in bribery and dishonesty that enriched themselves at the expense of the poor. God was saying, "When you treat your

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neighbors justly and righteously then I will accept your worship of me!” John wrote, “How can you love God who you haven’t even seen if you can’t love your brother who you do see?”

Since reconciliation is not just a sociological matter but a spiritual matter...

B) You need the grace of God and the power of the Spirit.

So PRAY and renew you mind and spirit! I don’t care if you read all the books ever published on the subject of reconciliation. If you are not living a Spirit-filled life - with the attitude and values of Christ shaping your heart, motivating your thinking and guiding your decisions - you will not be a man or woman of reconciliation. You can’t do it on your own.

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II. Reconciliation must be pursued! Make the first move!

“...seek peace and pursue it.” (Ps. 34:14) Pursue peace with all men.(Heb.12:14)

A moment ago I read to you Jesus’ instructions to take reconciliation so seriously that you should stop worshipping if you realize that you have offended your brother or sister and go immediately to make amends so that the wounded or broken relationship can be restored.

Now listen to some more words of Jesus regarding this issue:

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

- Matt. 18:15-17

In the first passage we are told to go to the one we have offended and initiate reconciliation, now he tells his disciples that if they are the offended party they should take the initiative and go to the person who has offended them and confront him/her? Why? In the context of chapter 18 the purpose is clear; so that the offending party can face their wrongdoing and repent and receive forgiveness from the offended party so that reconciliation is achieved. There is a crucial point the Spirit wants us to learn from this: No matter

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whether you are the offending party or the offended party, the responsibility to initiate the process of reconciliation is YOURS!!

There is a practical reason for this and a theological reason. The practical reason is that reconciliation is frequently hindered because each person is waiting for the other. Often both parties are at least to some degree offender and offended. Both believe the other person ought to go first and nothing happens. Reconciliation is too important to wait for the other person.

Now for the theological reason:

And all of this is a gift from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.... For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. – 2 Cor. 5:18,19

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. –Rom 5:10

The theological reason is that you are called to be like your Father.

Amazingly, our God turns out to be the initiator in the process of reconciling us to Himself, despite the fact that we were 100% the offending and 0% the offended party. If God waited for you to come to him, there would be no reconciliation. You want to be like your Father? Make the first move! If being like God and Christ isn't your goal, find another religion.

You don't have to work very hard to create a conflict; it comes way too easy. The hard work, the real effort, is in reconciliation and restoration.

Reconciliation does not just happen. Significant wounds do not heal by themselves without intervention. Severe cuts require stitches.

The first question you have to ask yourself is, "Do you want it?" You must want it more than you want to protect your pride and comfort.

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III. Reconciliation requires humility.

First you must be humble in your relationship to God. You must be humble enough to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. Not simply Savior, but Lord.

That means that I must submit what I want to what God wills. What pleases God takes priority over what pleases Randy.

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Second, you must be humble in your relationship to the person you need to be reconciled to. You must be willing to own your part of the conflict. Earlier I mentioned that in many conflicts each party is part offender and part offended. Last week I referred to spiritual myopia; the tendency to focus on me, myself, and I; to focus on my needs and not those of others. We also suffer from spiritual farsightedness in terms of spotting sin. We see the peck in our brothers eye while overlooking the huge log in our own eye.

There are two parts to sincerely owning your part of a conflict.

A) You must be willing to admit what you have done wrong. A lot of attempts at reconciliation and restoration never get off the ground because each party is waiting for the other to acknowledge where they have been wrong and apologize.

B) You must be willing to make amends if possible for the wrong you have done. Let's say I borrowed \$1000 from you with a promise to pay it back in a few months, but a year goes by and I never paid you back. Then say you come to me and graciously remind me about my promise, to which I respond, "I am really, really sorry. I totally forgot, please forgive me." "How will you respond?" Is sorry good enough when I have the ability to make right the wrong? NO! Zaccheus was willing to make right the wrongs he has done.

Owning your part in a conflict means taking responsibility for any wrong you have done, which involves making an effort to make right the wrong.

IV. Reconciliation takes courage.

You might get rejected. Pursuing reconciliation can often hurt because the process requires you to deal with a painful matter. It is less painful to just pretend that the offense never happened; that the offending person does not exist. This is why people separate themselves. We run away from the pain. Reconciliation requires courage because you have to run towards the pain. You need courage because the risk is real. I would like to tell you that if you just have the courage and take the first step, it will all work out. But that is not true. Most of the time it does. But I have experienced some failed attempts at reconciliation. The person might not forgive you. If you are the offended party, the person who offended you might not be willing to admit it. This is why you need courage and trust that the Holy Spirit will give you the strength to deal with a negative response.

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Jesus built the bridge. But we still have to be willing to travel the span. The good news is that the Holy Spirit is with you to help you make the trip!.

Jesus built the bridge. But we still have to be willing to travel the span. Our God is a wall breaking, barrier busting, bridge-building King. My favorite statement of the year is something God gave me last Christmas: Through the incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection event is the grandest bridge ever built, at the highest price ever paid, spanning the deepest chasm ever known, motivated by the most extravagant love ever displayed. God has built the bridge; He has flung open the door to His house. You just have to walk in.