

The Ministry of Reconciliation

David Flatt

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

The saints at Corinth understood the blessings of reconciliation. The church at Corinth was predominantly comprised of pagans/Gentiles. They were not biologically part of the family of Abraham. As a result of the cross of the Messiah, they were extended an invitation to become part of this covenant family. They could be reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

By their obedience to the Gospel, the saints at Corinth were given new life. Their previous condition of hostility toward God had amicably been resolved through Christ. Now, they were being sustained by a new relationship with God.

Their newfound relationship in God's family brought a new vocation: the ministry of reconciliation. A ministry is not a weekend hobby. A ministry is how we diligently use our God-given abilities in the service of others. By ministry, the world is served the Gospel and God is glorified.

The Ministry of Reconciliation and Us

Sometimes we have an adversarial view of the world. Unquestionably, there is danger in the world. We must resist the temptation of the world. However, Paul uses the concept of reconciliation to describe how we are to engage the world. Consider how we can perform the needed ministry of reconciliation.

1. Love for our enemies. The world is a battlefield for the powers of good and evil. The devil relentlessly works to gain ground in the hearts and minds of people. As he takes people captive, some will become hostile towards the cause of Christ. How are we to respond to such people?

Jesus teaches us to love our enemies. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:43-45).

Jesus did not give this teaching for the sake of causing us harm. Jesus teaches us to love our enemies because of the power of love. Responding to evil by love is unexpected. Love can

have a humbling impact on our enemies. Love compels us to surrender to God (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Only love can make a family from enemies. This is the goal of reconciliation.

2. Teaching the Gospel. The ministry of reconciliation is not just about the right kinds of actions. It is also about speaking the right kinds of words. When Paul went to Corinth, he preached the Gospel of reconciliation. He explained what the true, living Creator had done for the Corinthians through the self-giving love of the Messiah.

The Gospel's message of reconciliation to the Gentiles is perhaps best articulated in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Like the Corinthians, many of the Ephesians were Gentiles. Regarding the reconciliation of the Gentiles, Paul wrote, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near" (Eph. 2:13-17).

We cannot perform the ministry of reconciliation without teaching the Gospel. The world needs this message. They are on a crash course with the Creator. The only hope they have of making peace with Him is obeying Jesus. As the ambassadors of God, we must be guiding people to Jesus.

3. Making amends. The ministry of reconciliation begins with sinners making peace with their Maker through Jesus. However, reconciliation extends beyond this relationship. There are times in life when our relationships with other people can strain and break. This can happen between friends, within families, and among the church. Regardless of the reasons, and there are always reasons, we must seek reconciliation.

Jesus taught, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:22-24).

In this scenario, reconciliation is more valued than worship. Why? The God we worship is a God of peace (1 Thess. 5:23). Therefore, we are to be known as peaceful people. This does not mean we will never have problems in our relationships. When we do have problems, we will seek reconciliation.

Conclusion

The ministry of reconciliation is hard work. Yet, this task is to be a labor of love. We cannot allow self-righteousness to get in the way of this needed task. If we have lost our love for people of the world, we need to remember that we once needed to make peace with God through Jesus. A minister of reconciliation kindly taught us the Gospel. We must return this love by teaching someone else.

Likewise, if we have used our pride to build a wall between ourselves and a loved one, we need to swallow our pride. We need to build bridges, not walls. We must pursue reconciliation for the sake of harmony in God's family. As much as is in us, we must seek to live peacefully with everyone (Rom. 12:18).