

Reconciliation

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- [0 : 0 0] I know we're coming to a verse mid-sentence, but let me just read verse 16.
- About 23 years ago, several years ago, a long time ago anyway, in my estimation, my oldest daughter was teething.
- And when she was teething, having slept well for six months, she stopped sleeping. And it was my task to get up in the middle of the night to just comfort her and to be with her.
- And in these days, we were very short on a collection of videos to watch during the night, which is the kind of thing that I was forced to do, and was quite happy to do, actually.
- But the one video that we had that I remember was played time and time again in the middle of the night was The Lion King. And I'm sure many of you have heard of The Lion King or seen The Lion King.
- [1 : 3 2] The Lion King is now my daughter's favourite film, perhaps. It's also one of my favourite films. It's been made into a great stage show. I was very pleased when The Lion King was reissued 25th anniversary edition this year.
- It's a great movie. And if you haven't seen it, I don't want to spoil the story, but it concerns a young lion who is a prince.
- But this young lion, he gets into the situation where he thinks he's killed his father. And his father, of course, called Mufasa. His father is the king.
- But he thinks, he hasn't really, but he thinks he's killed him. And he's advised by his evil uncle Scar to run away. And so he runs away and he meets a couple of vagabonds and they sort of help him through his misery because he's feeling very miserable.
- And they say to him, look, just learn this motto, learn this phrase, *akuna matata* means no worries. And of course there's a song, a very famous song now with regard to that.
- [2 : 3 6] Meanwhile, the kingdom, his father's kingdom, descends into chaos. And his evil uncle Scar and the hyenas have taken over and the place is a mess.
- Eventually he's found. He's found by a princess and he's found by a baboon called Rafiki. And the baboon is a kind of witch doctorish type thing.
- So it's not very scriptural, this whole story. But the baboon says to him, you know, as they're trying to demonstrate with him to go back to what are called the pride lands, the kingdom, they're saying to the baboon is saying to him, who are you?
- Who are you? You've got to remember who you are.
- Who are you this evening? What is your identity? When we don't know who we are, chaos reigns.
- [3 : 4 2] Some of you might have struggled with assurance for many years and you will be able to testify to the fact that during these years chaos actually reigned in your life.
- You didn't know who you were. You didn't know if you were a Christian. You were absolutely confused and because of that confusion, you couldn't take a step forward in faith to become a member in the church and you couldn't therefore serve the Lord publicly in the church.

You tried to do your bit in private of you're a Christian, but really you weren't very sure and you weren't able to witness and able to testify to the truth of your condition. It's a very uncomfortable situation for people to be in because they didn't know, don't know their identity.

For young people here, don't be surprised if you find the teenage years that you're going through traumatic because in these years you're trying to work out who you are.

You're trying to establish your identity. What kind of person am I? What skills do I have? What gifts do I have? What career do I want to pursue? What strengths, internal personal strengths do I have?

[4 : 51] What are my weaknesses? What are my sinful tendencies? What do I need to be aware of, to be wary of rather? What do I need to be on my guard with regard to?

You're learning about yourself and that is a kind of stressful time and it fills people with all kinds of angst.

Don't be surprised by it. It's a process of establishing your identity. This was written to help people establish their Christian identity.

At least that's one way to read the book. And I want to encourage you, as I've been encouraged, to read the book that way. Because as you go through this book, you discover that Paul is speaking to these people and he's saying to them, you are in Christ if you're Christians.

You're united to Christ. You are blessed. A big long passage there on spiritual blessings in Christ from verse 3 to verse 14 of chapter 1.

[6 : 01] He describes them as saints. Did you realize that you are a saint if you are a Christian? There is a passage on appreciation. You are appreciated.

You are saved. Tonight I want to speak about reconciliation and I want to say if you're a Christian this evening, you are reconciled.

What does it mean to be reconciled? It means to be at peace. It means that people who were opposed or parties that were opposed to each other have been brought to peace.

Parties that were warring against each other have become friends. Who are we at peace with if we're reconciled? We're at peace with God. That's not a small thing.

That's a huge thing. Very often you'll hear people who know who they are and who are able to describe their spiritual testimony. They'll say to you that they experienced marvellous peace.

[7 : 01] What does it mean to be a Christian? What did it feel like? It felt like peace. Why? Because burdens had gone. Inmity was taken away.

I was at peace with God, my soul rejoiced. We're at peace with God. We're at peace with God's people. And we're also at peace of course with ourselves.

There's a whole lot of psychological, spiritual healing goes on. We're going to look this evening at this whole thing about, whole thing of reconciliation. What are you in Christ?

You are reconciled. Look at the context, go back to verse 11. Therefore remember that at one time you gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision, by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ and so on. Paul is speaking to what I might call the non-Jewish part of his readership, the non-Jewish part of the congregation.

[8 : 07] He's speaking really to those who have at one time been described as gentiles, non-Jews, the rest of the world in other words, all those people who had come to Christ and been converted.

And sometimes you know in the early church these people were made to feel like second class citizens. Sometimes they were tolerated.

Go back to the book of Galatians, those that are familiar with the book of Galatians, you'll know that those who came from a Jewish pedigree were saying to the gentile Christians, you need to be circumcised.

You don't just need to come to Christ, you need to be circumcised as well. You need to adopt the whole system of Moses. If you are really and truly going to be worthy, really and truly going to be accepted by us and by the Church of Christ.

Perhaps we can be like that, we kind of tolerate young Christians, whether young of age or just new Christians in our fellowships. We look at them with a kind of suspicion that are places in our denomination where it is difficult to be who you are.

[9 : 22] Perhaps a lowlander in a highland congregation or a highlander in a lowland congregation. There are some places where you are made to feel like a second class citizen because you don't have the shibboleths, you don't have the passwords, you don't have the way of speaking and the culture that everybody else has.

These things are really, really difficult. Of course there were real tensions in the New Testament era, real tensions outside the Church.

Why was Paul in prison? Paul is right in here from prison. Why was he in prison? Why had he been arrested? Because they accused him in Jerusalem of bringing a Gentile into the temple.

That was forbidden. Gentiles could only get into a certain part of the temple. The Jews have put up a literal physical dividing wall and they said you can only come here, come past here in the pain of death.

So there's this dividing wall that's been mentioned in this passage. There was real tension between Jew and Gentile. Five years later the Jews and the Syrians, I'm told, would be massacred in each other to death.

[10 : 47] They were at war with each other. Now Paul is inviting his readers to see the world differently and he's inviting them to see themselves differently.

And he's saying or he's giving them what we might call a history lesson. And that's what we're going to look at tonight in many ways, just what Paul says about them.

Before they were converted, before they became Christians, before they were reconciled, how does he describe them? Verse 12, you were separated from Christ.

You were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

These are staggering descriptions. So Paul is looking out and he's saying, you Gentiles, before you heard the Gospel, you were separate.

[12 : 00] You're separate from all the information of Christ, all the promises concerning Christ. And then when Christ came, but before you heard the Gospel, you were separate from Him.

That meant that you were excluded from citizenship. You weren't really counted. You were a second class citizen. You were foreigners to all the covenants of promise.

And then to crown it all, he says, without hope and without God in the world. You can see just how tense the situation was.

I suppose most of you know what it is to have experienced being on the edge, being on the edge of a crowd, not being welcomed in fully.

I remember when I was young, I went on a bus trip with some of my classmates. And the bus trip was to support a fellow in our class who was playing for, I think it was under 16s or under 18s in the Scotland football team.

[13 : 09] So we went, I think, from Cumbernauld to Medu Bank in Edinburgh. At least I think that's what it was. I may be wrong about that. But along the way, there was one very wise guy on the bus, a small minibus, and he was cracking all the stories and he was leading the conversation.

And I'm a fairly quiet guy and I was across, not quite far away from the group, but on the edge of the conversation, not involved in the conversation. And at some point, me having been silent for quite a while, this wag turned around to me and said, Gordon, you are like a ham sandwich at a Jewish wedding, which was meant to be funny and it was funny and also very embarrassing.

Ham sandwich at a Jewish wedding. We all know what it's like to be on the outside looking in. Think about the civil rights movements.

Think about being an African American in the States so many years ago and not being allowed to go on the buses or sit in certain places in the buses. Think about not being able to sit in certain seats in the restaurant.

Think about not being able to get certain jobs because you're on the outside. And we, I trust, are full of sympathy and horror that these things actually happened.

[14 : 33] Well, in a sense, I think that's where we pick up Paul's emotional reaction, if you like. Paul is saying this about the Gentiles. He's saying this with a sense of sorrow and a sense of pity.

Without hope, without God in the world. Can I apply this in two ways? If you're not a Christian tonight, Paul would still describe you as this.

He would still say of you, no matter all the good things that are going on in your life, no matter all the positive things, all the things you like and all the things you enjoy and the measure of happiness that you enjoy, no matter what you have, he would still say of you with a measure of pity and of love, he would say, you are without hope and you are without God.

As you look to the future, you don't live in hope, but you actually have a certain hopeless aspect as you look forward to the end of your days and indeed to meet with God at the judgment.

To be without hope and without God is an awful description of anybody. When Paul came into the New Testament world, he actually came into a hopeless situation.

[15 : 51] But I think in our generation, we are actually also moving into a kind of hopeless generation. We are moving in amongst a people who have taken God away as best they can.

And if you take God away, what's life all about? What do you do when things go wrong? What do you do when you're under stress?

What do you do when you're bereaved? What do you do when you're ill? What do you do when you have all kinds of difficult situations? You have to handle it on your own. And just because you have to do that and some people brazen up to do that and think that they will do that doesn't mean to say that people are coping with it.

The levels of despair in our society are increasing. Suicide is increasing. Escapism is increasing. Binge-watching Netflix, and I'm not at all condemning people who binge-watch Netflix.

I understand that. Binge-watching TV programs, escaping from reality. People have to do it because of the pressures that they feel.

[16 : 58] And there's no help for the problem, the crushing problem of guilt that people feel. Remember reading once a psychiatrist said that if people could deal with guilt, if people could deal with forgiveness, many of the psychiatric institutions would be able to close.

The reason people are in some of these institutions is because they haven't been able to handle things done to them or things done by them. And they're just struggling with guilt.

Know this though. Know this. Supposing you are right now without hope and without God in the world, the Gospel is sent to you to bring you good news.

It's sent to you so that you can hear why you can have hope. It's sent to you so that you can know reconciliation, and as we're going to see in a moment, that you can know forgiveness.

Paul's message was one of reconciliation. And the second point I would say is this. There's an evangelistic urgency in the apostle Paul.

[18 : 16] And it's an urgency that we must never lose. And I think in many ways the church in many places in the UK has lost it. You know, we're just not really involved or interested.

Paul saw himself as having this great ministry of preaching the good news so that people would be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

And we're all called to engage in mission, to go preach, make disciples. That's not just preaching for the pulpit. That is us, you know, day by day living our lives, living as God-blorifying lives as we can and speaking in God-blorifying ways as best we can so that people might be saved.

When you read that there might be somebody who has no hope and no God in the world, do not despise these people, but rather say, what can I do about that?

How can I reach into these people and bring them the good news of Jesus Christ? Anyway, we've been looking at the fact that before reconciliation they were without hope and without God.

[19 : 31] But from verses 13 or so onwards he is describing them, he's describing what's happened to them. They are now reconciled. But now he says, verse 13, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Brought near. Reconciled verse 16. How does that happen? How does it happen? Is it an easy thing for mankind to be reconciled to themselves, to others or to God?

Sometimes you hear of marriages that are in chaos, you hear of marriages that are broken down, but there's a hope for reconciliation.

And sometimes it takes many, many weeks of counselling, many weeks of people meeting in private, one in one with a counsellor or the counsellor with two.

What are they doing? They're talking out their issues, they're talking out all the problems. And it takes many weeks often because walls of division had grown up and they had grown up brick by brick and they have to come down brick by brick.

[21 : 04] It's not an easy thing to achieve reconciliation. So what about this reconciliation between God and man? How does this happen?

Verse 13, by the blood of Christ. There's the cost, there's the cost of your peace, there's the cost of your reconciliation.

You were a sinner, you were without hope, without God, you were an enemy of God and yet though you were still an enemy, God sent Christ into the world to die on a cross and Christ volunteers to go to that cross and carry our sin and receive the justice of God upon his people's sin.

He does that for you and for me. His death, as John's Gospel shows again and again, was in many ways his crowning achievement on this earth.

It was something he achieved, it wasn't just something that happened to him, it was something he accomplished, it was something he did. He went forward from Gethsemane into death to conquer death and to conquer this problem of sin that separates us from our God.

[22 : 22] How were you reconciled at what cost, through the cost of the blood of Jesus Christ, paying the debt of our sin upon that cross?

Through paying that debt, he secures your release from bondage, he secures your release from guilt. Forgiveness always has a cost.

Someone has to carry the cost. I think it was Tim Keller, I think off the top of my head at the moment, I think it was Tim Keller who told the story of if I give you £100, it's £100 loan and then if you don't pay me that back, I have the right to take you to court.

But if I say to you, well that's okay, just forget it. I carry the cost of that debt.

Think about scriptural illustrations, think about Joseph, you remember Joseph who had been thrown down a pit by his brothers and then sold into slavery.

[23 : 32] He goes off to Egypt, he suffers, he's in prison but eventually he rises to the top of the tree as it were, second in command to Pharaoh.

And his brothers come down from Canaan looking for food because there's a great famine on. And Joseph pretends the first couple of meetings not to know them.

But then I think it's a third meeting he reveals himself, he shows himself to be Joseph. And they of course are terrified because let's face it, at that point Joseph could have had them hung, drawn and quartered.

Nobody would have said boo to Joseph if he had said to Pharaoh, these men have come down from Canaan, they were my brothers, they betrayed me, they treated me harshly and I want you to just sentence them to death for that's what they deserve.

Nobody would have said anything to Joseph for that. But he forgives them, he forgives them and tells them that though they meant it for harm, God meant it for good.

[24 : 46] And he forgives them and then he provides for them and he proves to be a source of blessing. But he carries the cost of that. Think about the good Samaritan story, not quite so easy perhaps but you think about the enmity that there was between the Jews and the Samaritans.

And then the Levite and the priest, they ignore this man whose line on the ground has been beaten up and left for dead. They ignore him, the Jew ignores the Jew.

But the Samaritan, the enemy, he comes and he tends to the man's wounds and he puts him on the donkey, takes him to the inn or the hotel and says to the innkeeper, you look after him and pays the money.

And if there's any more cost involved, I will pay you on my return. He overcomes this enmity, this barrier and picks up the tab for this act of mercy and this act of grace.

And of course, Jesus does the same for us. He's like the good Samaritan, he sees us wallowing as it were in the mire. He sees us cast down, he sees us beaten up and left for dead and fit for hell and instead he comes alongside and he rescues us from the grave as it were and forgives our sin but pays the cost of our salvation.

[26 : 13] That great cost. I want you to know you're reconciled, I want you to know that that didn't come easy. It comes free to us but it comes at great price, the price of the blood of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we're reconciled through the blood of Christ. But then also he goes on to speak about how this dividing wall of hostility has broken, been broken down for he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

How? How did he break down the wall of hostility, the barrier? By abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

By abolishing the law. Not the moral law, not the ten commandments, I don't believe, but the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.

In other words, these laws that were Jewish laws, these laws that were ceremonial laws, these laws that said you can't eat certain foods, these laws that said you have to offer up sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice.

[27 : 41] These laws of ceremonies that said there are special days, holy days that you must keep. Those laws that said you must approach God through the priesthood.

All these things were fulfilled in Christ. He nails them, they're nailed to the cross. Our sin is nailed to the cross, the laws are fulfilled, they're no longer applied, there's no reason for division.

He abolishes them in the cross. I suppose in applying that, I would want to say this, we have to make it easy for people.

In Acts 15 there was this great council and the problem was this, how do the Gentiles come into the church? And we might say, what am I called strangers?

How do incomers come into the church? How do we welcome them? And in Acts 15 the decision is this, we make it easy for them.

[28 : 55] We don't make it difficult, we don't insist on all the things that were true of Judaism. We should not trouble verse 19 of chapter 15. We should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God.

We don't insist on things that have no basis in scripture. We don't insist on things that are just our tradition. We don't insist on our cultural ways.

We make it as easy as possible for people to turn to God. We don't abandon the moral law, but we abandon all things that are irrelevant.

We should write to them to abstain from the things excluded by idols and from sexual morality and what has been strangled and from blood. And some of these things he said, we're telling them that just as temporary measures because Moses, the laws of Moses have been preached in every city for generation after generation.

We can't quite abandon these things just yet. But it's that whole emphasis. We should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God.

[30 : 08] Jesus destroys the dividing wall and he describes it very interestingly as a creating one new man. What Jesus does is this, he reaches out to the Gentiles you might say and he reaches out to the Jew and he brings them together in himself and unites them in himself and relates them to God.

That's what Jesus does. That's the marvel of what Jesus does. The gospel is to reflect that and our churches are to reflect that. One of the best days I think I had in Muir of Ord was actually to have in my congregation two visitors, three actually, but one was a Jew, one was a Muslim.

People who would normally be opposed to each other in a radical way and yet they were in the one place where both parties are welcome because we welcome all kinds of people because we all come to God one way through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the touchstone of your life. Jesus is the great leveler. Jesus is the only one who can unite us together and unite us also to God.

They are now reconciled. You are reconciled and you're reconciled with God, but also you are reconciled with others and you're reconciled with everyone in Jesus Christ.

[31 : 56] Let me almost conclude with this. You are one in Christ. You're united in Him. See the implications of this that He makes the two one means that there are no foreigners, there are no aliens in the body of Christ, there are no second class citizens.

I hope you never feel like that in this place. I hope you would never feel like that in any of the churches in our denomination that you would say to yourself, well, I don't quite belong here.

I'm not quite welcome here. My face doesn't fit. I hope that would never be true in any of our congregations because Paul is insisting in this passage that that's not the way it has to be.

He's saying in verse 15 that we are one new man. He says in verse 19 that we are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, one household, one family.

He says in verses 20 and verse 21 really that we are one building. He's just throwing up illustration after illustration after illustration to say to the gentiles, listen, you are reconciled, you are not second class citizens, you are acceptable as everybody else no matter what your pedigree is.

[33 : 26] Tonight you might be very, very conscious of sin and you might be saying to me, preacher, you don't have a clue about me. You don't know my background and that's good that I don't know it actually.

I can be bolder, can't I? But I can say this to you, if you will and when you will place your faith in Jesus Christ, you will be as welcome in this place and in the fellowship of God and in the temple of God as any of the elders or any of the ministers that you have here.

You will be as worthy as they are because your worthiness doesn't depend on you, it depends on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what reconciliation ought to mean.

Well we conclude, are you reconciled tonight? Are you reconciled? And if you're reconciled, Paul would say, act out of it.

You see, I began by saying identity is so important. If we know we're reconciled, we will act differently.

[34 : 48] We will treat others differently. We will not be mean-spirited because we will realise that great things have happened to us.

As Paul goes on, when he goes on to the practical part of this letter, he says things like this, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ, just as God rather in Christ forgave you.

We're reconciled, we're united to God, our sins are forgiven, our brothers and sisters round about us are just the same as us, united to God through faith in Christ, we're not better or worse than they are.

They will make mistakes, we will make mistakes. Be kind, be compassionate to one another, forgive each other just as God in Christ forgave you.

You are reconciled, it's part of your identity. Let's bear our heads in prayer. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the gospel.

[36 : 07] We thank you that it is a gospel that has been worked out in your flesh. It's a gospel of forgiveness and it's a gospel of hope and it's a gospel of peace.

We ask Lord that we would avail ourselves of it, that your Holy Spirit would so work in us that we would reach out with both hands to receive this good news, this saviour, for He is our peace and through Him divisions are broken down and through Him the church is what it's meant to be and what it can be.

One new man, one household, one building. Lord help us to act that way.

Lord we pray that you would bless your people and bless the gospel to us in Jesus' name.
Are these things right, Father?