

The Church of the Servant King Soteriology Series

SO_5_What Christ Accomplished in His Death-Part 2 – Reconciliation

Definition & Description

Reconciliation is the *manward* side of the Cross. Reconciliation expresses the sum total of all that Christ accomplished on the Cross in removing the sin barrier that alienated man from God. God is propitiated, and man is reconciled. “The Bible never asserts that God is reconciled.”¹ All members of the human race are part of the cosmos (fallen creation on this earth subject to the dominion of Satan). As such, we are the enemies of God (Rom 5:10). However, as part of Christ’s work on the Cross, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19).

The Components of the Barrier Between God and Man

The barrier between God and man consists of several components. Try as he may through human good works (1 Cor 3:12b; Tit 3:5 cf. Isa 55:8-9; 64:6a), man will never remove the barrier that exists between God and man (Rev 20:12-15). Let’s examine the components of this barrier that separates man from God which was removed by Christ through His work on the Cross.²

- **Sin** – this is a reference to both the inherited sin nature that has affected all of humanity (except Jesus) since Adam’s fall and personal sin (which has its source the sin nature). See Romans 3:23 and 5:12.
- **The penalty of sin** – this is a reference to physical and spiritual death that became man’s destiny at the fall of Adam and that separates man from eternal life with God. See Genesis 2:17 (“dying you shall die”) which refers to the fact that at the fall, man’s spiritual death or separation from God because of sin carried with it a penalty of physical death. Death and eternal life are antithetical concepts. See also Ephesians 2:1 which documents the fact that Christ made us alive who were dead in trespasses and sins.
- **The essence of God** – the focus of this component is God’s attributes, in particular, God’s righteousness. At best, man has only relative righteousness, i.e. a righteousness that is relative to other humans and not the absolute righteousness of God. See Titus 3:5; Isaiah 55:8-9; and 64:6a.
- **Man’s position in Adam** – not only do we have the inherited sin nature from the point of physical birth, but we are also viewed by God to have been positionally in Adam when he sinned. This component of the barrier is closely related to the penalty of sin; however, the distinction is one of focus. The penalty of sin has as its focus our ongoing status as fallen creatures as we live our lives, i.e. we cannot have fellowship with God in life apart from God’s provision. Our position in Adam has as its focus the category of humanity to which we belong, i.e. “in Adam” or “in Christ.”

¹ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), Volume 3, 91.

² The fact that Scripture states that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor 5:19) means only that reconciliation is available to those who accept it. This passage supports a concept that is commonly referred to as “unlimited atonement.” However, as discussed in this document, the phrase “unlimited atonement” is a bit of a misnomer even though the idea that Jesus paid for the sins of the entire world and not just the sins of the elect is correct.

Biblical Terminology for Reconciliation

There are three Hebrew words that are translated *reconcile* or *reconciliation* in the Hebrew Scriptures. Sometimes these words are translated *atonement* and sometimes these words are translated *reconciliation*.

- *Kaphar* – means *to cover* and is translated *atonement* on 76 occasions and *reconciliation* on 7 occasions. A more correct translation of the Hebrew word *kaphar* is *to cover*. Accordingly, when used in the Hebrew Scriptures, *kaphar* referred to the animal sacrifices which typified the work of Christ.
 - In reference to animal sacrifices, sin was covered; however, the death of Christ takes sin away. See Colossians 2:14 – “Having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and **He has taken it out of the way**, having nailed it to the cross.” The phrase “He has taken it out of the way” is the 3rd Person singular, perfect active indicative of the Greek word $\epsilon\chi\alpha\iota\rho$ [airo] and is correctly translated here. The perfect tense and the indicative mood combine to emphasize the finality of the work of Christ here. The perfect tense emphasizes the finality of the work and the indicative mood emphasizes the reality of that work as a fact.
 - The English word atonement occurs only once in the KJV of the New Testament in Romans 5:11 and should be translated *reconciliation*.³
- *Chata* – this word is translated *reconciliation* only once (2 Chron 29:24) and means to offer a sin offering.⁴
- *Ratsah* – this word is also only translated reconciliation once (1 Sam 29:4) and means to be pleased with or satisfy a debt.⁵

The three New Testament words for reconciliation are all derived from the Greek word $\alpha\lambda\lambda\alpha\sigma\sigma\omega$ (allasso) which means to change. Variations of this Greek word are used in varying contexts in the New Testament, but where used in reference to man's relationship with God, the variant means to change from enmity to friendship.⁶ See Romans 5:10, 11; 11:15; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20, 21.

Distortions of the Doctrine of Reconciliation

One of the distortions of the doctrine of reconciliation could be described by the term *universal reconciliation*. Universal reconciliation is a form of universalism. This view is not based upon Scripture, but is based upon the same argument that was most likely advanced by Satan in eternity past when his sentence was pronounced by God, i.e. surely a loving God could not cast one of His creatures into hell. This view believes that all mankind will be reconciled to God in the sense that all will be saved. However, such a view is based upon a distorted interpretation of such passages as Colossians 1:20 – “and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.” The distorted interpretation fails to account for the already, not yet aspect of some of Christ's work on the Cross. The *already* aspect includes those spiritual provisions made available by Christ's death of which we are currently partakers, i.e. reconciliation of humanity to Christ through

³ Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1994), 359.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 360.

the destruction of the barrier between God and man. The *not yet* aspect includes the final reconciliation of the earth to God at the Second Advent of Christ (Rom 8:22).