

The Ministry of Reconciliation

What is the Gospel?

"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

(Romans 1:14-16)

When Jesus went to the cross and died for the sins and iniquities of the world, he left one debt to the Christian. This debt will never be paid as long as we live. It is the debt of preaching the gospel to the world. This is the reason we are left on earth. Just prior to His resurrection, Jesus gave us the commandment to go and preach to the whole world (Mark 16:15-18). It is called the Great Commission. Paul told us we owe this debt to the educated and uneducated, rich and poor, and to the religious and non-religious. The gospel is for everyone who will believe.

You do not have to be well educated to preach the gospel, nor do you need years of Bible teaching. You may become more proficient as you grow in the knowledge of God's Word but, as Paul told us, *"...as much as in me is, I am ready to preach"*. The book of Romans was written early in Paul's career; he would have a much greater knowledge of the Word later in his ministry. Paul is simply telling us, even if we only know a little of God's Word, we are prepared to preach the gospel. Like Isaiah, God is waiting for someone to say, "Here am I, send me" as He searches for someone to tell others of redemption.

Next, Paul tells us we do not need to be embarrassed by our stand for Jesus and His gospel. We cannot save others. God does this through His power, the gospel. Our responsibility is to share the good news. The Holy Spirit convicts them, draws them, and reveals Jesus as Savior to them. Once they say, "yes" to the message, the Holy Spirit produces the new birth in them. We are the heralds sent by God to give the message. God has given us the easy part. The Holy Spirit has the hard part.

The word “gospel” comes from two Greek words meaning *good* and *message*. The word simply means *good news*. We are not messengers of bad news, but good. Many today present the gospel as a message of fear and torment, but this is not the way God intended it. Just how good is the message? This brings us to the ministry of reconciliation.

Our Message Comes From Jesus

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be reconciled to God. For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

Jesus came into this earth with a ministry and a message. Once He left this earth, He gave both to us. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation and the message of reconciliation. Today, we preach in Jesus’ place and we preach His message. He is not only our example for how to conduct our lives, but also our example for winning souls.

Whether Jesus was preaching or performing miracles, He had one intent in mind, to take souls from Satan’s kingdom into His own. Miracles were not only designed to end pain and suffering, but to display the power of God for the removal of sins. After many healings and miracles, the scriptures tell us, *“many believed on him.”*

God’s desire was to turn that same ministry of preaching, signs and wonders over to us so we would also win souls. Our power and message is the same, reconciliation.

The War is Over

Reconciliation means “the procurement of peace between two warring parties”. God is never reconciled to man, but man is always reconciled to God. The war was over when Jesus, through the cross, brought man back to God. Man left God in the garden and God has sought a means through the centuries of bringing man back to Him. He succeeded through the cross. This is the ministry and message of reconciliation. The message is *the war is over*.

When I was young, my mother found an article in the newspaper I never forgot. The United States had purchased an island in the South Pacific to test nuclear weapons. We had been told the island was deserted; yet, when we first landed, three Japanese men living on the island began shooting at us. Once we were able to speak to them, we found out they were still fighting World War II. The war had been over for fifteen years, yet they had not heard. They had been stranded on the island and in their ignorance, continued to fight the war. It took time to convince them and they were humiliated when they discovered the truth.

That may sound like a strange story, yet we see the same everyday. The world is fighting a war that ended two thousand years ago at the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The word, or message of reconciliation is *God is not angry at man anymore*.

Reconciliation and peace are synonymous terms. Where you find the word *reconciliation*, you also find the word *peace*.

*“For he is our **peace**, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of two one new man, so making **peace**; And that he might **reconcile** both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached **peace** to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.”* (Ephesians 2:14-17)

What Is The Barrier?

Something separates man from God and keeps him from having eternal life. What is the barrier today between man and God?

When I was younger, I was taught in my youth group how to witness. We were given a tract called *The Four Spiritual Laws*. It contained a simple story of how man and God were separated by the sin of Adam. Separating God and man was a large barrier, a chasm called SIN. God could not cross the barrier because He could have no contact with sin. The barrier was also too vast for man to conquer. The tract pictured the cross as a bridge over the barrier of sin. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The cross did not bridge the barrier, *the cross destroyed the barrier*. Our verses in Ephesians said Jesus *abolished* the enmity and later, He *slew* the enmity. The enmity was the barrier. Jesus has slain the barrier and abolished it. How did He do it? Our opening verses in 2 Corinthians 5 tell us *Jesus became sin for us*.

Think about this. If the barrier placed between man and God by the fall of Adam was sin, and on the cross Jesus became sin, what is the barrier today? The barrier is JESUS. He is the entire issue of eternal life. Our message today is the same message Jesus preached in His day. *We do not impute trespasses to the sinner*.

Where Did We Go Wrong?

At what time did we shift from preaching Jesus to preaching sin? Where along the way did we think the message to the sinner was for him to stop sinning? After the cross, the next move is up to man. If the issue is still sin, then the barrier is again too big for man to conquer. The gospel has become BAD NEWS. If the barrier is Jesus and man's responsibility is to place faith in Him, then the barrier can be overcome. The gospel becomes simple, or GOOD NEWS.

The issue for the prostitute is not to stop her immorality. The issue for the drunkard is not to stop drinking. The issue for the drug addict is not to stop taking drugs. What would we tell the moral sinner to stop doing? There must be a common denominator among all sinners. No one is going to hell for his multitude of sins. All sinners are headed for hell and the Lake of Fire for one sin and one sin alone,

REJECTION OF JESUS. Whether the sinner has committed many sins or led a life of moral excellence, they have all said “no” to Jesus. Our message is to tell them God is not imputing their trespasses to them. This is the good news of the gospel. The sins of prostitution, drug addiction, Satan worship, witchcraft and alcoholism were imputed to Jesus on the cross. These sins are not being held against them anymore. Only one sin was not judged on the cross and is now left for them to judge. What will they do with Jesus? To accept Jesus is everlasting life and an eternity in heaven. To reject Jesus is everlasting death, eternity in hell, and the Lake of Fire. The message and the choices are simple.

Imputation

Why did Jesus not impute trespasses to the sinner? It's because God would impute their trespasses to Jesus. Why do we not impute trespasses to the sinner? It's because God already imputed their trespasses to Jesus. All of this occurred on the cross.

God took the sins of all mankind, past, present, and future, and placed them on Jesus. When Jesus died, so did all sins. When Jesus was made alive and rose from the dead, sins remained dead in regard to their hold on man. God placed our sins on Jesus and judged them. This is imputation.

Imputation means to “place upon, assign, or attribute”. We do not impute trespasses to sinners because they cannot be imputed twice. Anything judged once cannot be judged again. But imputation of sins is only half of the story.

Not only were sins imputed to Jesus, *righteousness was imputed to man*. God imputed my sins to Jesus and imputed Jesus' righteousness to me.

Claim Your Winnings

When Jesus sat down in heaven after the work of redemption was completed, God declared all men to be winners. It is our duty to tell all men to claim their winnings by accepting Jesus. Man has been reconciled through the work of the cross. Now our message is, *be reconciled to God*.

Suppose all employees at the corner drug store entered the lottery and it was announced on television one night they had all won. All they have to do is claim their winnings. Some of the employees hear about it and claim their winnings immediately. They go back to the store and tell the rest of the employees. Some run down in excitement and claim their winnings, but others refuse to believe it. If they never accept their good fortune, they will die without ever realizing a penny of it. It was theirs all along, but they had to come and claim it. So it is with the gospel. Because all men have been declared reconciled, does not mean it automatically passes on to all men. Everyone has to claim reconciliation personally, or they will sadly die in a poverty they never knew was cancelled.

Imagine sitting in a dark prison not knowing the ransom price has been paid and the door had been opened for quite some time. All you have to do is walk out. You are only a prisoner because of ignorance. Many of the previous inmates who have left have come back to tell the good news to the prisoners who remain. Some rise up and look to discover the door truly is open and they walk out. Others will not even get up. They refuse to believe the good news and decide to remain in prison. The price has been paid, but some do not receive it for themselves. So it is with the gospel.

We were all prisoners who walked out because we believed the good news, the gospel of Jesus. It is our command from Jesus to go back into the prison and tell others the same good news that set us free. The world does not need to die in their trespasses and sin. The debt has been paid and the door is wide open!

Bob Yandian

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