

Reconciliation

2 Cor. 5: 17-21

Readings with G. Davison

Our subject for the reading is reconciliation and it may help to point out that the subject is mentioned at least four times in the writings of the apostle Paul — Rom. 5; 2 Cor. 5; Eph. 2 and Col. 1. In Romans it is an objective thought; we receive reconciliation on receiving the gospel. Here in 2 Cor. 5, it subserves new creation. In Eph. 2 it is brought in to prepare for the mystery, Jew and Gentile both reconciled in "one body". Then in Col. 1 the ground of it is shown to be both the blood and the body of our Lord, dealing with our guilt and state when He died upon the cross. It is also described for us in Luke 15, in the well-known threefold parable of the activities of the Godhead in redemption to bring man back for Its pleasure.

You made an important remark that reconciliation is subservient to new creation. Will you open that out?

Two things are in view in this chapter; the complete answer to the breakdown through sin coming in, and the opening out of a completely new order of things in our Lord Jesus Christ as risen from the dead. First, by His death He has reconciled us to God, removing all the enmity and moral distance which existed between our souls and God. Then God has now introduced us who are reconciled into a completely new order which never needed the death of Christ because sin will never defile it. Had we not been reconciled, God could not have righteously introduced us into that new order. I do not think new creation is the **outcome** of reconciliation but rather, when we are reconciled, God can proceed with His work and bring us into it; reconciliation having freed us from the old, we are righteously available to God to bring us into line with His purpose by bringing us into new creation.

So that while we are waiting for all things to be made new, **we** have already been put into that position. This has in view the day when new heavens and a new earth will be in existence. While the new heavens and the new earth are not dependent upon, nor the outcome of, the death of Christ, we should never have been there apart from the death of Christ.

We have tried to trace out the work of Christ and have found that it is always in relation to the breakdown through sin, and by it He has recovered everything for God. On the other hand when we come to new creation, so far as we have found, that is always the work of God. Christ works to recover all that was lost, then God brings in something entirely new. Another place where that is clearly seen is in Eph. 2 where in the first ten verses we have the work of God. He quickens and creates us "in Christ Jesus" which, of course, is new creation. Then from v. 11 to v. 17 we have the work of Christ, He redeems and reconciles us. The remaining verses speak of the work of the Spirit, He gives us liberty of access and builds us together for an habitation. We have the work of Christ dealing with that which is old and affected by sin, but God brings in that which is entirely new.

Is new creation seen in two ways — material and moral? Material in the new heavens and new earth, and moral now "in Christ Jesus".

Yes! What we are brought into now in Christ Jesus will really be established fully in the eternal state. That is its eternal home. That whole scene will bear witness to the fact that God has brought in something entirely new. Already we have been brought morally to that position before God. We now are fitted for that new scene which will then be brought into being.

I would like more said about the distinction between the work of Christ and the work of God. You have said that Christ has dealt with all the failure that has come into that work which began with the re-ordering as seen in Gen. 1: 3, and as a consequence God has introduced something new. I understand that it is not exactly because of the work of Christ, for it was in His mind before the breakdown came in. I wanted to make that clear.

While it is said in 1 Cor. 15, "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural", yet have we not learned that if the natural did come in first so far as the time ways of God are concerned, the spiritual was there first in the mind of God?

In the first creation God forms it then puts in the man, but in the new creation God has the Man first and He is building everything round Him.

"New", then, is according to His divine workmanship.

Although it is new, it is only new relatively to that which is old. God ever had it in mind before the old was created, that is historically.

God had in mind in purpose that men should be there in that blessed scene where all things are new. There is no comparison between what God has purposed and what was there when Adam was created. He had no intention of ever taking that man in innocence into that new scene, but it was known that the breakdown would come in; Satan would intervene and it was counselled that Christ should come in and deal with the breakdown, then remove it, so that God could fulfil the purpose of His mind. Is that it?

That is what we are trying to suggest. Perhaps the difficulty to our minds is found in the fact that two things are running on together in each one of us. God is working out in us what He has recovered on the one hand, and yet forming in us something entirely new on the other, which will never need recovering. In this very chapter we have that clearly seen. The first thirteen verses deal with "in the body". From v. 14 to the end deals with "in Christ". In the body is the life of responsibility which will end at the judgment seat, but the life we have "in Christ" in new creation is that which goes on eternally. Then, the sphere in which we move as "in the body" comes under the Lordship of Christ, while "in Christ" comes under the Headship of Christ. In the first section we have mention of "the terror (fear) of the Lord", but in the second we have mention of "the love of Christ". We are moving in both of these spheres today.

That is a most important remark and I do hope the saints have really got it. There are these two spheres, under His Lordship, and "in Christ". In the latter there is no responsibility. Every question concerning our responsibility lies in the realm of "in the Lord". A simple illustration of this is "Children, obey your parents in the Lord". There may be breakdown in that realm and we know, alas, that there is breakdown there, hence the many exhortations we are given in relation to it; but "in Christ", I cannot trace any vestige of failure at all; it is something which is wholly new and morally fitted to adorn the day of God. That is the difference between those two spheres.

Is it because new creation is in view here that the thought of enmity, which is in the other Scriptures dealing with reconciliation, is not mentioned?

Yes! Reconciliation is brought in here with the object of bringing us into new creation. The other Scriptures have more in view what it has delivered us **from**, hence the thought of enmity, but here it is more to show where it has brought us **to**. Being reconciled, we are free to be brought into this new order. The old ground must be cleared ere God could have us in the new. As human beings we may attempt to effect something and failing to do so may throw the material away; but we cannot think that God will do this. Recovery first, then the introduction of something entirely new. In 2 Tim. 1: 9 we

read of "purpose and grace . . . in Christ Jesus before the world began". Purpose is spoken of first then grace, but if the grace was needed in view of recovery it was to fit us for the place God had marked out for us in His purpose. It is worth noting that while grace provided for our salvation and purpose for our calling, we have salvation mentioned first in the verse to fit us for that calling. From our side it must be so, but we read that the purpose preceded the grace from God's side. It is of interest to note how these two things are turned round in the verse; salvation and calling from our side but purpose and grace from God's side.

One has helpfully said, "Death was the womb of new creation and resurrection was its birth", both of course referring to our Lord in His work and its results. It was ever in the mind of God for us but only came into being at the resurrection. That is why our Lord came in responsible Manhood prior to the cross, but He brought that to an end for God in His death, with a view to introducing something entirely new in His resurrection and here we have it. "Therefore if any man be in Christ". There has been this development in the working of God. It did not come to light during the life of Christ, though He was moving on to the accomplishment of the purpose of God, but in His resurrection is the scene where sin and death can never come.

Is that which is physical to be reconciled?

Yes! that is what we saw in Col. 1. I am afraid we have said more about new creation than reconciliation which really is our subject. We do have the reconciliation of all things taught in that chapter, and this will be brought about by power whereas **we** are already brought into it by the Spirit. By power I mean the rule of Christ in the kingdom.

That it is possible for us to know this today is clearly stated by the apostle in 2 Cor. 12 where he says, "I knew a man in Christ". That is the completion of the gospel of the glory and in its realization he said he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body.

Is it not right to remember that the body is not yet brought into it?

Yes! the body is still subject to earthly conditions and perfectly right in its place. If the body is held in relation to the Lordship of Christ as outlined in the first thirteen verses, then while there is not yet full conformity, it is not in question.

Is it right to say the body is not yet reconciled?

My body did not need to be reconciled. We have often pointed out that the body is never said to be sinful. The man who dwells in that body is sinful, in a state of alienation called the "old man". That is what needed judging in the body of His flesh through death, but the body itself is never said to be sinful in Scripture. I may have used the body for sinful purposes but it is not itself sinful or it could never be used in the service of God.

"Glorify God in your body" is what is expected of us now.

The body is recovered in the fact that the man who dwells in that body and uses it is recovered. Once we used it in the service of sin but now we use it in the service of righteousness.

It is remarkable that now I can prove in the movements of my body what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Shall we not have a body fitted for that scene in the eternal day?

Yes! that is mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, "our house which is from heaven".

Will you say a little more about the reconciliation of all things?

None of us can read our Bible without seeing there are evil influences in the heavens, perhaps Satan as the chief, but other beings like him. We understand these beings were assigned places of authority by God to use them for Him but instead, in some way, they have attempted to use their power against God in rebellion. If for some reason God allows this at present (not that they in any way hinder Him from effecting His purpose), the day is coming when as the fruit of the shedding of the blood of Christ, the spheres they fill will be cleansed and they will be ruthlessly expelled from them; the spheres of authority will be taken up by Christ in that day and will be used for the pleasure of God. In that way they will be reconciled and used for the glory of God.

In Job it says the heavens are not clean in His sight.

Eliphaz said that and maybe those men had already discerned that evil influences were operative in the heavens. This is what we read of in Eph. 6. We are going to occupy those places, but the beings who fill them now have to be expelled from them and in the reconciliation of all things every principality and authority, every throne and dominion will be in the hands of Christ, and in the world to come every one of them will be used for the pleasure of God.

You have said the administration will be put back into the hands of Christ. One has noticed for a long while that when you come to "all things" in Scripture they usually stand in relation to the Christ. This seems to be so both in the Gospels and the Epistles, though in the gospel by John they are said to be in the hands of the Son, the same Person of course. The One Whom we appreciate as the anointed Man is the Son. You remember in John 4, "Messias cometh, which is called Christ . . . He will tell us all things". Even a Samaritan woman seemed to know that all things lay in relation to the Christ. Again, God is going to head up all things in the Christ (Eph. 1: 10 N.T.).

We read there, then, "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself". We ought to note that phrase, "to Himself". You remember how God said to Israel, "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself" (Ex. 19: 4). This seems to describe for us the effect of reconciliation, to bring a people to God for Himself.

The truth of reconciliation is in many places in Scripture even if the term is not used. Peter says, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins" — propitiation; "the just for the unjust" — substitution; "that he might bring us to God" — reconciliation. It seems to be the highest thought we can reach in regard to the work of Christ in recovery. In Heb. 12 the list of all that stands in relation to Zion, the topstone is, "God the Judge of all".

While He has reconciled **us** to Himself, we read, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself". It seems that both persons and things are involved in this, persons being the object of this ministry as it is there for all.

All will be seen fully in accord with God in the world to come. It is a necessity for God to be thus glorified where all has been besmirched by sin. In the eternal state, it is not so much the vindication of the character of God as the satisfaction of the heart of God.

We read in v. 18, "reconciled us" and in v. 19, "committed unto us the word of reconciliation". Are they the same company?

No! It is the Christian company in v. 18, and the apostolic company in v. 19 to whom this word of reconciliation was given to preach it in the gospel. The ministry began when Christ came into the world, so far as I see it, "God **was** in Christ". The elements of reconciliation are seen in the acclamation by the angels when Christ was born. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men". Here is the Man Who is going to glorify God and effectuate peace, and God is going to find His

delight in His creature. Sometimes brethren quote that Scripture as "good pleasure in a Man", but I am sure if you do that you miss the force of the expression entirely. Certainly God had great pleasure in the Man Christ Jesus, as He testified both at the banks of the Jordan and in the mount of transfiguration, but this means that God is going to find His good pleasure in men as the fruit of the work of Christ.

So that is a prophetic utterance, the result of which is seen in Rev. 21, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men". God pleased to dwell with His creature.

We often quote for the ministry of reconciliation such Scriptures as, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3: 17). While all this came out in testimony during His life, we have to learn that only in His body through death could that reconciliation be made effective. I have long thought that the **ministry** of reconciliation began in the life of Christ, but the **word** of reconciliation going out subsequent to His death is to assure us that the work has been effected.

The word of reconciliation waited for the death of Christ and the coming of the Spirit.

That is what our brother has called attention to, "committed unto us" the apostles, that it had been effected.

How thankful we are that we are not excluded from the "us".

I have not yet grasped the distinction you are making between the "ministry" of reconciliation and the "word" of reconciliation.

It says about the first that God was in Christ, and I judge that in the testimony of Christ in this world He assured man that God was not bent upon his destruction but upon his recovery. "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee"; "I will, be thou clean"; "Neither do I condemn thee", all show this to be so. His coming into the world had this object in view — to bring man back to God. The angels **declared** it at His birth and He **testified** to it in His life, but in His death He **effected** it and now the Spirit comes down using the apostolic band to beseech us to be reconciled to God. The whole blessed principle was exhibited in all that Christ said and did, but before we could come into it the coming of the Spirit was necessary. Only men filled by the Spirit could announce to us this word of reconciliation.

The most simple thought in reconciliation is, where there was distance there is now nearness. The wonderful effect in one's soul is, that while one was very conscious of moral distance from God, one can now come to God conscious that that distance is gone and be at home in His presence.

I wonder if everyone caught the meaning of your reference to 2 Tim. 1? We are told God "saved us, . . . not according to our works, but according to His Own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ" — this is the **ministry**; "Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". Then we read, "Whereunto I am appointed a preacher" — this would be the **word** of it.

That is why I said, historically we have been saved and called with a holy calling, for the holy calling could only take effect with us after He had saved us; but when we come to God's side about it, it does not say "grace and purpose" but "purpose and grace". Primarily purpose precedes grace, or the calling precedes salvation, for God could not call us apart from salvation. It is remarkable in that verse how the two things are turned round.

We may get quite interested in the theory of this and miss the blessedness of it in experience such as we read of in Luke 15.

It has been suggested that almost the whole of the Pauline ministry can be found in the gospel of Luke, and much of it in chap. 15. Could the younger son have any doubt as to his welcome in the father's house? Would he ever again have in his soul the feeling of distance which he had in that far country? Nor could I imagine the son talking about the far country; I think he would be more inclined to talk about his father's house. The chapter is almost taken up with the activity of the Shepherd, then the woman, then the Father, quite in line with Col. 1 where the Godhead is seen active in reconciliation. I have long held that the best robe, which to me speaks of new creation, is the fruit of the work of the Father. The ring suggests relationship, and that speaks of the work of the Son. The shoes suggest sonship, and that is the fruit of the work of the Spirit. I believe we all bear the marks of this threefold work which has been done for the pleasure of the Godhead. All things are new.

One has often heard the statement that reconciliation bridges the distance between God and men but does that statement go far enough?

No! Reconciliation **removes** the distance, not bridges it. If you bridge a thing you connect the old with the new, but the old thing is removed by the death of Christ.

Is not reconciliation a fact accomplished?

Indeed it is. We have seen that in Romans we receive it, but like every divine blessing we knew little of it when we first believed the gospel. We come on to this divine teaching because God wants to bring us into the light and power of it, that we might be moving pleasurably to Him in the enjoyment of it and in response to it for the delight of His heart of love.

Would you say a word on the eternal state and the fact that reconciliation will not be required there?

If we break up the word a little into re-conciliation, we gather that the conciliation between God and man which was established at his creation was broken through sin. Now, as the result of the work of Christ and the complete way He has removed sin, He has brought man back in such conditions that he can be happy in the presence of God. Things in the eternal state will never need reconciliation for sin will never bring in distance or estrangement. A remark we heard some years ago may be of help here. In the garden of Eden we do not read of a wall, and the result was — sin got it. In the Holy City, in the world to come, we read of a wall great and high — sin will not be able to get in. Yet, in the eternal state we do not read of a wall for in that day there will not be any sin to get in. Seeing there will never be failure, the idea of recovery is not there at all. We see then in this passage that while God recovers us out of the old, He has put us into something entirely new where reconciliation will never be needed.

There is no thought of reigning in the eternal state because there is nothing to restrain.

The word "new" used in relation to the eternal state does not mean revivifying of what has become old, but the introduction of something which is entirely new. One has been interested of late in noting that word for new — *kainos* — it is something of a new character entirely. While it will be brought in in that day as something entirely new, yet it was in the heart of God eternally. We do not speak lightly of the world to come, it will be a wonderful time. One has said, In that day God will explain Himself in His actings, for all will be seen clearly in the light. A touch on the same line comes out in Rev. 10 and 11. We read in Rev. 10, that in the day when the seventh angel will begin to sound, the mystery of God will be finished. That mystery is the enigma of God's allowing so much evil to go unchecked today. We often wonder why God allows so much to happen even to His people, but the angel says here that veil is going to be rolled away and we shall see clearly in the light. We turn to Rev. 11, and read, "the seventh angel sounded"; here is the moment of revelation. What happens? The first thing is, the whole heavenly company fall down on their faces and worship God saying, "We give thee thanks". When God

does roll the veil away I believe the very sorrows and apparent disasters which give us such concern today will be seen in **that day** to have worked for His glory and our blessing, and we shall thank Him for them all. That is the world to come and we do not want to under-estimate it, but the amazing thing is that God still has something better for us in the eternal state.

In the spirit of that today we are exhorted, not only to give thanks **in** all things, but to give thanks **for** all things. The world to come should be the subject of our conversation as the apostle says, "the world to come of which we speak".

That is why so little is said about the eternal state. We cannot take in much relative to it, for all things are new. It is just the same in relation to the glory. Peter says that if we are reproached for Christ's sake, the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. But then we are to have an eternal weight of glory which we could not endure in our present conditions; our bodies would collapse under it, but in that day we shall have bodies capacitated to sustain that glory.

We are not told what those bodies are like except that they will be like Christ.

We have Scripture for that, "What we shall be has not yet been manifested". Christ has been seen in His body in resurrection for He manifested Himself to His disciples, but what we shall be has not been manifested. There is something beyond what they saw. We must remember it is the same Person, whatever form He may have been seen in. "This same Jesus".

At the end of this chapter we read, "He hath made Him to be sin for us". That is the groundwork by which we have been reconciled, but this is a verse I do not pretend to understand apart from the fact that He took our place in wonderful grace that He might bring us into His place before God.

Is this appeal, "be ye reconciled to God", practical?

No! it is what the apostles preached in their testimony. The work was done and they came out with the appeal to men — "be ye reconciled to God". So he says "we pray you in Christ's stead". It was presented to men in the gospel.