# BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT MAN, SIN, AND SALVATION
## Lesson 19: Reconciliation

This is the sixth of seventeen lessons on the biblical doctrine of salvation (soteriology, from Greek *soteria*, salvation). This lesson focuses on reconciliation, the truth that Christ's sacrificial death restored the broken relationship between sinners and God and brought peace between them.

**Lesson 19 – Central Truth Q and A**

Question: How does Christ's death bring reconciliation?
Answer: Christ's death brings peace between God and His people who are separated and alienated from Him because of their sin.

**Lesson 19 – Memory Verses**

**Romans 5:10** *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*
**2 Corinthians 5:18-19** *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.*

**Lesson 19 – Introduction**

The term "reconciliation" has the basic meaning of restoring unity between holy God and sinful man. Because of the Fall of man and the inherited sin of Adam, all people are hostile toward God and unable to mend our broken relationship with Him. In His infinite love and mercy, God chose to reconcile His chosen people to Himself and restore this broken relationship through the blood sacrifice of His Son.

**1. The Meaning of Reconciliation**

The concept and words "reconcile" and "reconciliation" are found only in the New Testament. The verbs translated "reconcile" (Greek, *apokatallasso*, *katallasso*) are found a total of nine times in the NT. The noun translated "reconciliation" (Greek, *katallage*) is found four times in the NT.

> Paul claims that reconciliation between God and human beings is effected by being washed in Christ's blood as shed on the cross. This reconciliation has ramifications for the reconciliation of the entire universe, which has been out of sorts with God ever since the fall of Adam and Eve and will not be fully restored until the return of Christ (Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21:1-5).
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> In Ephesians 2:16, Paul refers to reconciliation on a human level, namely, that of Jews and Gentiles. Such reconciliation also comes by way of the cross, through which Christ put an end to human hostilities and divisions by creating a new humanity (i.e., the body of Christ). All artificial human divisions should cease to exist in the church, and a failure to do so results from a failure to see what Christ and his sacrifice can ultimately do.

> In classical Greek, *katallasso* usually meant the coming together of two persons after a time of hostility; it was rarely used in a religious sense…. It the NT, however, *katallasso* is a theological term describing the removal of enmity between humans and God (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20); it occurs only once in reference to human relationships (1 Cor. 7:11, husband/wife; it is significant that marriage is the relationship chosen for the use of this word). In biblical thought, God reconciles humans to himself through the death of his Son (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20)…. This divine act does require a response of faith from human beings. This is why Paul admonishes his readers to "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20)…. Such removal of enmity between God and the human race should lead to missionary zeal—to our being Christ's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20).[1]

**2. The Necessity of Reconciliation**

Man's sinful nature has made a breach between us and God. Christ is our only hope of reconciliation. This truth is emphasized in Charles Wesley's beloved Christmas hymn, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*:

> *Hark! the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King;*
> *Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!*

This much needed and long awaited reconciliation was only possible through the birth, life, and death of God's dear Son. Romans 5:6-7 describe man's helpless condition. We are "without strength" or completely helpless to change or improve our present, sinful situation. There is no possibility of depraved sinners having a restored relationship with the holy God apart from Christ's merciful intervention. Those who rebel against a king become his enemies; and a righteous king will punish them. God is the majestic and righteous King, and every person is a rebel against Him. Yet God devised a plan to bring sinful men back into a right relationship with Himself through the perfect sacrifice of His Son. This act of God's sheer grace and kindness toward sinners is often neglected, even misunderstood, as described by A. W. Tozer:

> The whole outlook of mankind might be changed if we could all believe that we dwell under a friendly sky and that the God of heaven, though exalted in power and majesty, is eager to be friends with us. But sin has made us timid and self-conscious, as well it might. Years of rebellion against God have bred in us a fear that cannot be overcome in a day. The captured rebel does not enter willingly the presence of the king he has so long fought unsuccessfully to overthrow. But if he is truly penitent he may come, trusting only in the loving-kindness of his Lord, and the past will not be held against him.[2]

**3. The Work and Result of Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is entirely a work of God. Sinful man could not restore a right relationship between himself and God. We were not seeking God (Rom. 3:11), but God by Christ's work on the cross was seeking our salvation and reconciliation. It is through Christ alone that we can be reconciled to God. There is no other way or means by which we can be at peace with God because no other substitute or advocate could be holy enough to be acceptable to the perfectly holy God. The reconciliation of God in Christ is a finished work. Those who repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are at peace with God forever (Rom. 5:10, 17). There is no more hostility with God now or ever.

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[1] William D. Mounce, Gen. ed., *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 565-566.
[2] A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 89-90.

We who were once God's rebels and enemies, and as such deserving of His judgment and wrath, now by trusting in Christ have been brought to God (1 Pet. 3:18) and have been restored to loving fellowship with Him. We will never be separated from His love (Rom. 8:38-39). Although our circumstances may at times be dark and difficult, our relationship with God is unchangeable and secure through Christ.

**4. The Message and Ministry of Reconciliation**

Those who are reconciled to God in Christ become ambassadors of God's message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:20). Reconciliation is personal and practical. It may be said that in salvation God does something *for us* so He can do something *to us* so He can do something *through us*. We are given the privilege and responsibility of going into the world to proclaim the message of reconciliation. This glorious message has been entrusted to believers so that we would tell the good news of Christ's perfect work to those who are still God's enemies and in eternal danger (2 Cor. 5:19). Paul describes the ministry of reconciliation as the work of "ambassadors for Christ," those who are authorized to represent Christ Himself. Paul's language is intense and expressive: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). To "beseech" is to appeal, urge, or exhort. To "pray" is to request or beg as Christ's representative. Through us our gracious Lord appeals to lost sinners to turn to Him. As Christ's servants, we must represent Christ in our earnest appeals for sinners to come to Him. We should not overlook the passion of Paul's plea: "When Paul was committed to some principle of divine truth, he implored people to respond. He didn't approach the ministry with detachment or indifference."[3]

[3] John MacArthur, *Strength for Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), reading for January 6.