

Christmas is About Reconciliation

Colossians 1:19-23

Dr. Michael Helms

Advent 2 December 9, 2018

Recently, Aaron Rogers, the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, gave \$1,000,000 to victims of the fires in one of the California communities near the area where he grew up and played football. It was a very generous and heartfelt donation.

However, it prompted his brother to call him out and say that his actions were hypocritical. He was showing care and concern for strangers, yet he didn't have enough consideration to pick up the phone and call his mother to check on her while she had her car packed and ready to evacuate her own home.

The fires brought out an unfortunate family matter, that the Rogers family has been estranged for years.

Crises situations will do that. The holidays highlight our estrangements as well. We can move through most the year fine, pretending these issues don't matter or don't exist, but when families are supposed to come together, that's when we are reminded that estrangement isn't normal.

We get word that someone in the family isn't coming after all, or one of them is showing up for the Christmas meal chronically late, which angers someone in the family because he or she is always late. Right in the middle of the family gathering, someone brings up politics and an argument starts and before the gifts are unwrapped the family is divided.

Usually, people are already stressed, trying to fit schedules with multiple families keep everybody happy.

Sometimes when I go fishing, I get a knot in my line, and I cannot reel it in.

If it's just one little knot, I can usually untangle it.

Sometimes, though, I get a wad of hopeless tangled knots as big as my fist and I just decide to cut it loose instead of trying to untangle it all. It's easier that way.

To try and untangle that mess is just too painful. It takes too much time, too much effort, with no guarantee that I will succeed.

That's what some people have decided to do that with some of their relationships. They are just too much of a big jumbled, mangled, mess and they have decided it's easier to be estranged than to try to untangle it all.

When you read the Bible, you discover God and humankind became estranged a long time ago.

The breach in the relationship happened when humankind thought we knew more than God. We read about this in Genesis chapter 3.

²² And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” ²³ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

This Genesis story is about estrangement. It is about how we became separated from God. It’s not a pretty story.

Our sin became so great that in a later chapter it says God was “grieved” that he made us. Our sin looked like a wad of hopelessly tangled knots and God decided to cut us loose instead of trying to untangle it all.

That’s what the Great Flood story is about. God only saved a remnant of people and animals on an ark. He started over.

But wouldn’t you know it? People just got themselves all tangled up in a mess of broken relationships again. We became just as much of a tangled mess as before.

But God promised he wouldn’t cut us loose again, and the rainbow in the sky was the symbol of that promise.

The Old Testament is a long story of God seeking to untangle the mess that humankind continued to make of things so we could be reconciled to Him.

It’s also a series of stories of humankind trying to find our way back to God.

We have writings such as these from David who wanted to be reconciled to God:

“Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me!” (Psalm 40:11-13)

Our sin creates estrangement from God. Until we deal with the sin problem, the separation is going to remain.

Sin creates a tangled mess of pain, misery, heartache, and grief.

We enter this world innocent enough. But it doesn’t take long for children to begin to pick up the habits of their adult teachers.

Children don't even have to be trained to become distrustful, dishonest, and disrespectful; sarcastic, self-centered, and selfish.

One of the places the Old Testament is very clear that sin separates us from God is Isaiah 59:1-2:

"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."

Isaiah is clear that sin equals separation.

The Apostle Paul also stated it well in Romans 8:7-8: "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God."

Our tendency to follow our own way is the reason why we are estranged from God. We have a bad case of the "can't help its," and there is no cure – no cure – no chance of being reconciled to God – apart from Jesus.

While we have a history of being estranged from God. The good news is that there is Christmas – the birth of Jesus.

When we sing this hymn, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," we sing a basic truth about Christmas.

Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled.

There it is – **God and sinners reconciled.**

"Reconciled," reminds us that before Jesus, we were separated from God. We were estranged.

All the efforts of humankind throughout the centuries to find our way back to God always failed.

For the most part, our hearts remained hard.

There were two brothers that lived on adjoining farms, but they had a deep quarrel. They had often shared their resources, but that practice stopped. There was nothing left but bitterness.

One morning one of the brothers, we will call Jerry, answered a knock at his door. It was a carpenter. The carpenter asked if there was any work to do.

Jerry said that there was something he could do. He took the carpenter to where the two properties met and showed him how the other brother had taken a bulldozer and created a creek where the meadow used to be.

Jerry said, “I know he did this to make me angry. I want you to help me get even by building a big wall so I won’t have to see him or his property ever again.”

So the carpenter worked hard all day. When he reported back to Jerry, Jerry noticed there was no wall. The carpenter had used his skill and built a bridge over the creek instead of a wall.

Jerry’s brother saw the bridge and was very touched that his brother would do such a thing.

The two brothers met in the middle and embraced. They saw the carpenter packing his tools and asked him to stay a while and do more work.

The carpenter replied, “I’m sorry, but I have other bridges to build.”

<https://www.preaching.com/sermon-illustrations/reconciliation>

In the fullness of time, God sent Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, raised by her and the carpenter Joseph, to build a bridge from heaven to earth to reconcile God and humankind.

Jesus built that bridge with a cross that stretched from heaven to earth designed to reconcile sinful people unto himself.

No longer do we have to be estranged by God because of our sin. God sent a carpenter named Jesus as our mediator.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy:

“This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

How does Jesus reconcile us to God? How does Jesus make us acceptable in God’s eyes?

Colossians 1:19-20 says: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

To reconcile means that Jesus was bringing things back the way they were in the beginning.

Jesus had this authority and the power to do this because He is God incarnate. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega.

Jesus was present with God in the beginning. All that was made was made through him.

In the Garden of Eden, there was peace, purpose, and perfection before sin entered the world. In the Garden, death did not have victory over us. Death entered the world when we rebelled against God.

On the cross and through his resurrection, Jesus restored to us our hope that death no longer has the final say in our lives. Or sin no longer has the last word.

So we read further in Romans these words: “You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you” (Romans 8:9-11).

What Paul is saying is that we are all going to die because our bodies are subject to death. However, if we have been reconciled to God because we have placed our trust in Jesus whose shed his blood on the cross, Christ is in us. Because Christ is in us, the same power that raised Christ from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies also. When we are joined with Christ in immortality, that is when we will achieve perfection, but not before.

Until then, we are all involved in a ministry of reconciliation.

Paul said to the church at Corinth,
“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation”
(2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

That is the reason we sing,

Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled.

Anyone reconciled to God through the mediating ministry of Jesus is bound by the gospel to share the message of reconciliation.

That is difficult to do if sin pops back up in our lives, which we refuse to confess and repent. It’s difficult to do if reconciliation needs to occur with others.

It is impossible to do if we have never reconciled our sin with God.

To be reconciled to God, you need to accept five gifts from Him.

- 1) The gift of Jesus' birth as God's gift to reconcile us to God.
- 2) The gift of Jesus' life which is an example of how we should live.
- 3) The gift of Jesus' death which was given to cancel the debt of sin in our lives which causes our estrangement.

- 4) The gift of Jesus resurrection, which is proof of his ability to conquer death and give us life.
- 5) The gift of Jesus' Spirit, which empowers us to forgive others, gives us a chance of reconciling with them and is our guarantee that God is with us and that we have the gift of eternal life.

If you have not accepted these gifts, you might be like Aaron Rogers who does good things, like give a million dollar to the fire victims in California but still be estranged from family and even from God.

You might do a lot of good things, but still be estranged from God. What a tragedy that is, not only now, but if you were to die estranged from God, that would be an eternal tragedy.

Give the angels something to sing about today. Be reconciled to God today. It's the first step to being reconciled to others.

© Copyright 2018 John Michael Helms