Reconciliation: A Thematic Study in Pauline Theology
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INTRODUCTION

Looking for the interpretative key to unlock the theology of St. Paul has proven to be an elusive and complex proposition. Various proposals have been detailed with each offering constructive contributions to the field of Pauline theology. Paul's leading themes are usually held to be justification by faith, salvation 'in Christ', redemption, sanctification and reconciliation. Others could be added to the list but as R.N. Longenecker writes, "the conclusion is inescapable that the focus of Paul's preaching was on the redemptive significance of Christ's work." 1

The issue then becomes which term can we turn to as being primary in Paul's explication of the work of Christ. Recently, Ralph P. Martin of Fuller Seminary has written suggesting that reconciliation must be the pivotal term upon which Paul's soteriology hinges. 2 For Martin, reconciliation acts as a watershed from which Paul's missionary and theological thought receives its momentum and extrapolation. Martin credits the original seeds of his thought to have been planted by T.W. Manson. For Manson, "reconciliation is thus the keyword of Paul's gospel so far as its working out in Christ is concerned." 3 Martin provides a thorough and detailed study of Paul from this interpretive perspective, but others such as Ernst Kasemann are not convinced. He writes, "There is no unified, overall category for the soteriological terms and motifs of the New Testament. In the New Testament a whole host of different conceptions are used to characterize the essence of the eschatological salvation. In this case the variety is constitutive of the whole. Hence one must be careful not to isolate any one of these themes or to give it pride of place over the others." 4 Kasemann's point is well taken and his methodology and position on reconciliation specifically demand serious attention. For now, suffice it to say that reconciliation is at least one of several significant terms in Paul's expression of the work of Christ.

Even though reconciliation is fundamental to all of God's dealings with his people reaching back to Old Testament times, it is found explicitly only in the Pauline corpus. 5 The term is used once in Matthew 5:24 but not in a theological context. In this sense the
term can be said to be uniquely Pauline in its usage. Neither is the term picked up by any second century writers. In the two primary texts, Romans 5:8-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 the term occurs nine times in either the verb (katallasso) or the noun (katallage). The noun is cited once more in Romans 11:15 where the rejection of the Jews works to "the reconciliation of the world." I. H. Marshall writes, "Here is a distinctively Pauline way of presenting the significance of the cross and of all the concepts used to explain the effects of the cross, $reconciliation' is the one which belongs most clearly to the sphere of personal relationships." Other terms used to explain the Christ-event deal with relations between legal parties (justification) or commercial dealings (redemption), or cultic ritual (sacrifice). Thus Marshall sees reconciliation as "the least metaphorical" way of expressing the work of Christ.

Before proceeding to a thorough scrutiny of the two central texts, some background on the term reconciliation itself may prove prudent. The Roots of 'Reconciliation'

Essentially reconciliation is the restoration of two estranged parties to friendship and relationship. It implies that a previous relationship existed. The Greek words katallage, apokatallasso, diallasso, katallaso, are all compound forms of the root "all", denoting "a making otherwise". The words are common in Greek literature both in a secular and a religious sense. In secular usage they denote a change of relations between people or groups of people (nations), a change from enmity or hostility to love and/or friendship.

In the religious sense, the words are used in reference to the reconciliation of gods and man. We also see this type of usage in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX).

Leon Morris notes that katallaso occurs only once in the LXX in Jeremiah 48:39 where the word means, "How is it changed!" and therefore fails to shed much light on our investigation. Diallasso occurs once in 1 Samuel 29:4, "Wherewith will this man be reconciled to his master?" This citation is significant in that it shows David being reconciled even though the enmity is not his but King Saul's. This has significance for an understanding of texts where man is said to be reconciled to God. I.H. Marshall comments on this text, "The significant point is that the verb is used in the passive (i.e. deponently) of David taking the initiative in reconciling Saul to himself. David persuades Saul to give up his anger." We find the same usage in the only New Testament use of this verb in Matthew 5:24. There the man has no anger against his brother but because
of the enmity of his brother he himself takes the initiative to effect reconciliation. Morris moves one step closer to the sitz en Leben of Paul by examining the use of reconciliation in the Judaism of the intertestamental period. Morris cites Strack Billerbeck, "In Rabbinic writings the two verbs ritstsah and piyyes are especially used for katallassein." Both of these verbs deal with the removal of enmity. 12 Basically the Rabbis taught that a man must first be at peace with his fellows before seeking reconciliation with God, anything less would be hypocrisy. (In Matthew 5:22, Jesus affirms this position). The responsibility rests with the guilty party, but sometimes the "victim" is seen to take the initiative in reconciliation. 13

Several midrashes speak of God's anger in the incident involving the Golden Calf and the need for reconciliation. A saying of Rabbi Isaac is recorded, "Moses reconciled God with Israel through the second Tables." The midrash continues to explain that both Moses and God were angry with Israel. But since both could not be angry, God became reconciled to them. 14

Josephus uses the verb katallasso three different times. Twice he uses it to refer to human reconciliations, first when the woman says to David, "Be first reconciled to your own son and let your anger toward him cease," (Ant. 7:184) and when the Levite went after his concubine (Judges 19) he 11redressed her grievances and was reconciled to her" (Ant. 5:137). The third occasion speaks of Samuel who "all night long set himself to entreat God to be reconciled to Saul and not wroth with him" (Ant. 6:143). 15

Several key references occur in 2 Macabees. The following are two examples. "May he open your hearts to his law and his precepts, and give you peace. May he hear your prayers and be reconciled with you, and not abandon you in the time of evil" (2 Macc. 1:5JB). The thought is that God will respond to the prayers of the Jews by overlooking their sins. 16 Of significance for our discussion is the story of the martyrdom of the seven brothers by Antiochus. The brothers interpreted their sufferings as being partly divine punishment (2 Macc. 7:18), but also as a means of inducing God to forgive the nation. "We are suffering for our own sins, and if, to punish and discipline us, our living Lord vents his wrath upon us, he will yet be reconciled with his own servants" (2 Macc. 7:32-33).

Thus the view of 2 Macabees is that when people sin they evoke the wrath of God. When his punishment is inflicted, his anger is satisfied and he is reconciled to his
people. But the experience of punishment may lead the people to pray to God to be reconciled to them and give up his anger and God may do so. Marshall writes, "In short, God is reconciled, i.e. abandons his anger, as a result of the prayers of the people and their endurance of the punishment which he inflicts upon them." 17

Morris summarizes, "The Jews certainly held that God was angry when man sinned, and that this demanded an act of reconciliation. They do not hesitate to speak of God as being reconciled to men, by which they mean that his just wrath is removed.

**Reconciliation in Paul**

Due to limitations of space we will restrict our examination of reconciliation in Paul to the two key texts of 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 and Romans 5:8-11. Two other significant occurrences, namely in Ephesians 2:16 and Colossians 1:20, will have to be put aside for now. Because their authorship is less certain than that of Romans and 2 Corinthians it would be permissible to omit them from the discussion.

At the basis of Paul's use of reconciliation, or for that matter any other term describing the significance of the Christ-event, is his understanding of the human condition with respect to God. As Paul saw it there was enmity and hostility between God and his creation. In Romans 5:10, Paul writes, "If, while we were enemies..." and in Colossians 1:21 he writes, "You...once were estranged (apellotriomenous) and hostile." The cause of this hostility is man's fleshly (sarx) tendencies, "Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh...To set the mind on the flesh is death" (Romans 8:50. Joseph Fitzmyer comments on Paul's use of sarx: "Paul means by flesh the humdrum, non-elevating condition of human existence in its earth-oriented propensities and refusal of openness to the Spirit. Hence the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. Man left to himself cannot help but set his mind on flesh. This is why Paul lists "enmity" among the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:20'. " 19

The joyful message that Paul preaches, and that he has experienced personally (Paul called himself the chiefest of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:15) is that God through Christ has reconciled the world to himself. Fitzmyer points out that Paul never says that God is reconciled (in the passive) to man as we found in 2 Maccabees and Josephus, but he
understands that in the Christ-event "God sent forth his son" (Galatians 4:4). 20 (a) 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

In chapter 2:14 to 7:4 of 2 Corinthians, Paul digresses to defend his ministry and the gospel he is proclaiming. Thus this whole section is Paul’s appeal to those in Corinth who question his integrity. Paul asks them to put their hostility behind them and accept his proffered reconciliation, already given to the ringleader (cf. 2:5-11).

The teaching of this anti-Pauline group in Corinth was in direct conflict with Paul. They saw Moses as a "divine man" law-giver (cf. 3:1-18), they relied on worldly success to validate their preachers (cf. 4:1-15), they saw the future contained in the present and denied a future resurrection (cf. 4:165:10). They even thought of Paul as lacking in mental competence; he was "out of his mind" (5:13). Paul's reply basically consists of an appeal to Christ's great love. In light of what Christ has done Paul can comprehend no other response than forgiveness. It is the inexhaustible love of God that enables Paul to forgive his accusers at Corinth (cf. 2:10) and now in chapter five, he again extends to his detractors the same reconciliation. Paul cleverly interweaves a piece of a traditional church hymn or confessional bit in 5:18-21 to show that his attitude of forgiveness is central to the work of Christ. A more compelling appeal is hardly conceivable. 21

I.H. Marshall and R.P. Martin conduct a structural analysis of the passage that yields the following shape:

18.  
A1 All this is from God,  
A1 who through Christ reconciled us to himself  
B1 and gave us the ministry of reconciliation

19. that is,  
A2 God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not counting men's sins against them B2 and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation

Then the order is reversed:  
20. B3 So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through 3 US. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
For our sakes he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The structure effectively shows the two aspects of the total act of reconciliation for Paul. Namely, the work of Christ on the cross and man's receiving of the reconciliation effected by Christ.

We recall that our background study of reconciliation, especially in 2 Maccabees, presented God as offended by man's sins and responding in judgment and wrath. But now because of Christ's identification with man's sin God sees man as righteous. God has dealt with the sins that aroused his wrath and now there is no barrier on his side to the establishment of relationship. 22

Marshall notes three important points: First, God's wrath was removed by Christ as he died on our behalf and by becoming sin for us. Second, the work of Christ was the plan and purpose of God himself (God is the subject) and the third, the object of the action is all of mankind. 23

Martin suggests that "the literary structure of the passage suggests a carefully prepared piece of soteriological credo expressing what the first Christians believed about God's redemptive work." 24 Part of Paul's epistolary method is to add interpretative or explanatory comments to these existing hymns. We find this in verses 19b and 20c--phrases which are full of Pauline language. The reason for these glosses by Paul, suggests Martin, is first to make it clear that the 'reconciliation of the world' was achieved by what God did in not holding trespasses against mankind. It is interesting that Paul inserts 'against them' whereas earlier the first person plural is used (we, us). The effect is that 'against them' clears mankind of guilt by use of the image of justification. In this way Paul grounds reconciliation in God's action against sin, protecting it from a false understanding- 25

Second, verse 20c is added to soften the blow of 'Christ's ambassador'-a phrase reflecting authority only attributed to Paul at a later stage (cf. Ephesians 6:20). Since it was part of the confessional statement Paul included it, but not without modification.
Thus Paul interprets reconciliation in terms of justification. God does not impute trespasses to man's account thereby showing that he 'justifies the ungodly' (Romans 4:5).

The content of Paul's concept of reconciliation includes the following: (1) identification, (2) representation, (3) imputation, and (4) reconciliation. These will now be dealt with: 0)"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" can be interpreted several ways but the point is to show that God himself is personally involved both by the agency of Christ and also by coming himself in Christ. (Longenecker has pointed out that the early church was concerned with functional Christology over ontological Christology thus reminding us not to read into the text something about the nature of Christ's deity and God's presence that may be beyond the scope of Paul's purposes.) 26

(2) Representation. In this text Paul clearly presents Jesus as the representative man. In verses 14-15 the phrase 'for all' (hyper panton) shows the representative work of Christ and in verse twenty the same preposition is used to describe the apostolic ministry. Martin comments that “Paul says no more than 'he died for others' by acting representatively in their name, with the consequence that his act has the profound effect of changing personal attitudes and dispositions. They for whom he died no longer live for themselves but for him." 27

(3) Imputation. The sinful race formerly in hostility to God and his enemy is restored to divine favor (v. 21) by a transference or "imputation" (as Paul states in Romans 4:4-8). Christ took our sin that we might be free from condemnation and therefore righteous and acceptable before God.( Interestingly this is the only passage where Paul speaks of the sinlessness of Jesus. )

However, this is not the only distinctive feature of verse twenty-one. Nothing is mentioned here concerning the voluntary death of Jesus--only that God 'made' him sin--in contrast to Philippians 2:6-8. Secondly, Adam's 'trespass' is not mentioned, where it seems it could serve to contrast the loving obedience of Christ, the second Adam. Thirdly, Paul's use of 'the righteousness of God' is unique. Paul's usual use carries the sense of a disclosure of divine power leading to salvation. But the notion of believers becoming part of that is different from Romans 5:19 where believers are I constituted righteous'. Martin writes, "The idioms of 2 Corinthians 5:21 are not justification terms and state simply a substitutionary change. The issue of how God has
dealt with human sin is left open and no rationale, such as the Pauline justification teaching offers, is given to throw light on the pressing moral conundrum: how did Christ's identification with sin open the way for Christians to receive his righteousness?"

28 The verse must be understood and explicated by the Romans 5:8-11 passage which will be dealt with below.

(4) Reconciliation. Christ inaugurated a new era, a new creation (verse 17). Paul is not referring here to a new birth (personally) but rather the advent of a new age in Christ. That is, the recovery of the world from its state of alienation and hostility. God has acted eschatologically in Christ to reconcile the world.

Herman Ridderbos suggests that reconciliation and justification are very similar ways of describing the new relationship between God and mankind—one term cannot be subordinated to the other. While "to justify" is a religious forensic term, reconciliation is a social-relational term referring to the restoration of right relationship. Paul often places reconciliation in the context of enmity or alienation or hostility or positively with the term If peace" (ereine of Ephesians 2:15f; Colossians 1:20f). 29 I.H. Marshall suggests that because reconciliation is a term used of interpersonal relationships it is one of the most concrete ways to express the new relationship of God to 30 men.

Yet the key to grasping "reconciliation' is to separate it into its two distinct parts, namely, Christ's work and man's response. God's work in Christ must be viewed in forensic terms for it is his objective, one time act that changes the status of men, moving them into a new age. 31 The flipside of this, man's response must be seen in ethical terms. Thus we have a parallel between reconciliation and justification--both are forensic. This dimension will become clearer and receive further treatment in the Romans passage. C.E.B. Cranfield proves very insightful on this point when he suggests reconciliation and justification are not identical, nor is reconciliation a consequence of Justification but rather that--with the exception of sinners--justification involves their reconciliation, the removal of enmity and the establishment of peace, objectively by God. "Whereas between a human judge and an accused person there may be no really deep personal relationship, the relation between God and sinner is altogether personal, both because God is the God He is and also because it is against God Himself that the sinner has sinned." 32

(b) Romans 5:8-11
The larger passage of 5:1-11 actually is an expansion of Paul's thought implicit in 3:21-26, his thesis paragraph. Though as Martin points out, chapter five is more than conclusion of what goes before. It is a 'major landmark' in the letter indicating a decisive move forward in Paul's thought. 33 Up to 4:25 P4a~ has borrowed the framework of Jewish apocalyptic, the present age of God's wrath and the age to come. Now in chapter five, Paul introduces the notion of reconciliation to express Christ's justifying work on the cross more relationally and personally. This concept is further expressed in subsequent chapters by images such as the family of God, life in the Spirit and living in community. Justification has provided the basis but now Paul launches a "lexicon of terms referring to the new life in Christ on more personal levels." 34

I.H. Marshall sets up the passage structurally to highlight the similarity

of justification and reconciliation:

10. For if
   while we were enemies
   by the death of his son

8. while we were yet sinners
   we were reconciled to God
   Christ died for us

9. Since, therefore,
   much more
   we are now justified
   by his blood,
   much more
   shall we be saved by him
   from the wrath of God.

   much more
   now that we are reconciled,
   shall we be saved by his life

Thus Paul equates sin and enmity and identifies Jesus' death for sinners (resulting in justification), with the reconciliation of God's enemies by the death of his Son. Marshall writes, "The important thing is that reconciliation is an act of God prior to and independent of any abandonment of enmity to God on our part." 35
"While we were enemies" refers to both the active and passive aspects of the term (echthos). It is easy for us to posit man as God's enemy but it is somewhat more difficult for us to see God as hostile to man. We prefer to stress the love and mercy of God and see hostility as one-sided, met only by God's love. However this is not the case for if there was no hostility on God's part, there would be no need for Christ to die. Throughout chapter 11 of Romans, God is shown to be hostile toward Israel: God spared not the Natural branches' (v. 21), they are cast away (v. 15) and 'broken off' (v. 17). In 1 Corinthians 15:25f, God shows his active hostility too by saying, "He must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet."

Vincent Taylor comments, "In Romans 5:10 echthroi describes, not only the hostile attitude of men, but also their character in the eyes of God. He sees them as enemies; and., yet he reconciles them to Himself." 37

Thus there seems to be an indication that reconciliation includes reconciliation of God in the usage of 'diallasso'. This is consistent with the usage in the LXX of David being reconciled to Saul--even though Saul was at fault. The same usage appears in Matthew 5:24 where the initiative is taken by the innocent party and remarkably the one taking the initiative is the one said to be reconciled. 38

God is reconciled, not by some outside party but by himself. He decides to reach out to man and in a forensic way no longer sees man as his enemy. The barrier that alienated man from God though erected by man is removed by God, objectively and forensically. It is now man's choice to accept God's act of reconciliation or to erect a new barrier, either by active refusal or passive indifference.

This perspective makes the gospel theocentric (or Christocentric) rather than anthropocentric. Morris writes, "Thus we can speak of God as being reconciled (though it is necessary to use the term carefully). God now looks on man no longer as the object of his holy and righteous wrath, but as the object of His love and His blessing." 39

Central to this understanding is the realization that man was dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), he was powerless to overcome the separation between himself and God. Only God could initiate and accomplish such a world changing event in Christ.
The structure used by Marshall (see above) highlights the parallel Paul erects between justification and reconciliation. Therefore with John Murray we say that if justification is seen as forensic so must reconciliation, otherwise the parallel breaks down. Joseph Fitzmyer says that "as Paul begins chapter five he moves from justification to the manifestation of God's love in Christ and through the Spirit (chapter 8), so that the latter is the climax.

If so, justification is only a part of the process and a stage in the development of his thesis in Romans chapters one to eight and then justification finds a more adequate expression in reconciliation; indeed, "reconciliation becomes the better way of expressing that process."40

Reconciliation is accomplished once for all in, the death of the Son of God. But the removal of our enmity to God cannot be regarded as something accomplished once for all. Verse 11 says that we receive reconciliation, which refers not to the removal of our enmity but the gift of God to mankind. This agrees with what is said earlier in the passage, namely that our status before God is one of 'peace'. Seeing reconciliation as the removal of God's alienation from us corresponds to our peaceful status in God's eyes.

Thus the strength of Paul's claim in verses 10 and 11 is made clear. If when we were alienated from God he loved us enough to send his son (renewing our peaceful status), now how much more shall the risen, exalted Christ ensure our salvation (eschatologically). To do one and not the other is inconceivable. 42

'Through the death of his Son' we are reconciled to the Father, that is, by means of Christ's death. It is not a pardon or overlooking of sin for it required the death of the Father's 'beloved Son'. Also through Christ, God's love for mankind is manifest and the cause of his hostility is dealt with.

'We shall be saved through his life' refers to the risen Christ. The resurrection is directly attributed to the Father throughout the New Testament and is therefore his vindication of his Son and his acceptance and identification with Christ's work.
When Paul says, "through whom we have now received reconciliation" in verse 11 he is referring to the personal appropriation of Christ's work. Paul is writing to Christians who have personally accepted Christ's act of reconciliation by responding in loving obedient relationship. Paul is a little more explicit here than in 2 Corinthians, which reflects the circumstances under which the two letters are written—Romans is a positive letter filled with hope of meeting the Christians at Rome soon, while 2 Corinthians is more of an attempt to reconcile Paul and his detractors.

Ralph Martin suggests that in Romans Paul's teaching emphasizes "by the use of past (aorist) tenses of the verbs that reconciliation is a historical event. Second Corinthians 5:18 has the aorist participle, yet verse 19 with its periphrastic tense leaves the reconciliation more in the state of an ongoing process than a final deed." 43

Romans is also more specific in its subject. In 2 Corinthians (as well as Colossians 1:15-20) 'world' may be understood in a cosmic sense but in Romans 5, Paul is precise in his reference to 'sinners'. "The background is not so much one of 'trespassers' (2 Cor. 5:19; Col.1:21) and 'estranged persons' in an alien universe (Col. 1:21) as 'enemies of God' who stand in need of

44 being delivered from their exposure to the 'wrath of God'."

And in this light the image of reconciliation has a existential quality making it suitable to express the tension in Paul's theology between being already justified but not yet finally saved.

**The Relevance of Reconciliation for Today**

Ours is a world in which relationships play a major role in politics, commerce, religion and social hostility. Due to advances in transportation and communication relationships on a global plane are taken for granted. Yet with this increased contact there is also the danger of greater hostility, with increased technology there is the danger of seeing the world in humanistic terms and the danger of neglecting to realize our inherited past. To each of these dangers the message of reconciliation speaks. It reminds us that hostility between opposing views must be dealt with, it reminds us that God has taken the
initiative in breaking down the barrier between man and God, and it reminds us of the fundamental necessity of friendly relations between all people and ideologies.

In this sense the concept of reconciliation offers us much greater potential in the proclamation of the gospel message than do other metaphors such as expiation or even justification which may find little understanding in our world. But everyone is aware at least of the significance of reconciliation and has even experienced it on a personal level. The task of the preacher therefore is made much easier because his audience can relate to the concept quite readily.

**Conclusion:**

Reconciliation though used sparingly by Paul in the precise use of the term has significantly influenced his thought on the work of Christ. We have not tried to be exhaustive here and certainly much more could be said particularly on the Ephesians and Colossians passages. However our analysis of Romans and 2 Corinthians has served to give us the main facets of the concept.

Essentially reconciliation is an objective act of God's initiative in Christ whereby he deals with man's sin by forensically removing it, opening the way for friendly relations between man and God. God chooses to effect reconciliation rather than inflict his wrath upon mankind. This act of love is of great cost for it requires the death of Christ. Reconciliation was a one time act of the past that changes man's status before God. This was done while we were yet sinners and effectively demonstrates that we can be assured that God will follow through on what he started by saving us unto the consummation.

Man's responsibility is to accept God's act and by personal appropriation establish a consistent, obedient, loving relationship with God through Christ. Both reconciliation and Christian discipleship are in essence relationship with God through Christ.

**Endnotes**


3. Ibid, P. 5.


5. This of course depends on how one defines Paul's letters. Some discount the references to reconciliation in Ephesians and Colossians on this basis E. Kasemann ). While the present writer considers these letters to be from the hand of Paul, their provenance is not a major concern here. We will restrict ourselves to the relevant passages in Romans 5 and 2 Corinthians 5.


8. Ibid, P. 117.


12. L. Morris, P.216.


16. I.H. Marshall, P. 120.

17. Ibid, P. 121.


23. Ibid, P. 123.


25. Ibid, P. 95.


34. Ibid, P. 139.


36. Leon Morris, P. 221.


38. Leon Morris, P. 236.


40. J. Fitzmyer, P.165.

41. J. Murray, P. 173.

42. Ibid, P. 175.

43. R.P. Martin, P. 150.

44. Ibid, P. 150.

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