Grace Group Study Guide

 Greater **>** Week 6

Colossians 1:18-20

One of the most encouraging things I’ve heard in the last couple of months was from a member of this fellowship. He was telling me about how he was taking steps towards mending a formerly broken relationship with an old friend. What better way is there for us as Christians to demonstrate our love for others (even those who have done us harm) than to take the first step in *reconciliation!* As we looked at it on Sunday, the idea of reconciliation meant someone in a once hostile relationship taking steps towards changing the nature of it.

How many of us are at odds with someone else? How many of us have grudges or burdens from past relationships or friendships gone badly? Those things happen, don’t they? Even the best of relationships is susceptible to difficulty. There are two ways to handle fractured relationships. The first is to ignore them. The second is to seek reconciliation. I understand that it’s easier said than done – especially when you were the one on the wrong end of a bad deal.

I can’t help but think of the movie “Home Alone” and the conversation that young Kevin McCallister has with an elderly neighbor. It’s Christmas time and they meet up in a church where the neighbor tells Kevin of an argument he’d had with his son some years before. During the argument, they had both lost their tempers and stated that neither wished to see the other again. Years had gone by and the elderly neighbor hadn’t seen his son or his son’s family, all because of their argument. He goes on to say that he missed them all dearly. At that point, Kevin says (as only an 8 year old can do) “sooo….why don’t you call him?”

It sounds so easy, yet it’s so difficult to take the first step towards reconciliation. If you’ve watched that movie 150+ times (like myself) then you know that one of the last scenes in the movie depicts Kevin looking out his window to see that gentleman welcoming his grown-up son and his family into his home. All it took was someone deciding that a step had to be taken and taking it!

Romans 5:8 is one of my favorite verses because it speaks so clearly about reconciliation without even mentioning the word. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” What does it mean to **you personally,** that **you** are the root cause of **your** broken relationship with God, and that Christ died for **you**? It is a sobering statement about a broken relationship (while we were yet sinners…).

You see…there was a time when the relationship between God and man was intact and beautiful – in the garden. It was the relationship as God had intended it to be. But Adam and Eve failed to keep the commands of God and ultimately fractured that relationship. God is a righteous judge and we are sinful people. The wages of our sin is death. See the problem? The relationship was broken and there was a need for reconciliation. That reconciliation was initiated when the Word became flesh and completed when Christ died and rose again in order to satisfy the wrath of God.

S. Lewis Johnson comments on another example of reconciliation concerning Luke 15*: “When we think of an illustration in the New Testament, one of the illustrations that comes to my mind is the parable of the forgiving father, often called the parable of the prodigal son (See Luke 15:11-32). But the important person in the parable is not the son, the important person is the father. That’s the way we do, we tend to want to look at things so selfishly that by the time we read one of the Lord’s parables we’ve turned it around and made it something else. In the parable of the forgiving father, the father with the two sons, one of whom is the prodigal and the other is the one who stayed at home, in that parable, the climax of the parable is when the father sees the son finally returning, and races down the road in order to fall upon his neck.*

*It’s Jesus Christ’s picture of God. And the picture of the return of the prodigal, who forgives beforehand – who has already forgiven – is the picture of the reconciliation of the Jew to God and the Gentile to God, and of both together to the Lord God. “That he might reconcile both to one God in one body.” We often think of God as a God who requires that we do certain things before He will love us. But that is so foolish. The Bible does not present to us a God before whom we must do certain things in order for Him to love us. The Bible presents a God Who has loved us before, and has given the Son as the redeeming sacrifice in order to save His people.”*

T.C. Smith adds another beneficial look at reconciliation when he writes in the Holman Bible Dictionary: *“The New Testament not only reveals God's act of reconciliation in Christ, but it also exhorts us to be reconciled to fellow human beings. Since God has taken the initiative in removing our hostility toward Him, it is incumbent on us to take action in overcoming the enmity that exists between us and others. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that reconciliation with one's brother was essential to genuine worship of God (Matthew 5:23-24). Paul in Ephesians 2:14-18 dramatically proclaimed that through the cross Christ reconciled both Gentile and Jew into one new humanity by terminating the hostility that existed between them. The church is commissioned to perform a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:12-21). As the body of Christ, we have received the reconciling word, the command and power to be at peace with God and one another.*

*Paul used other words to express essentially the same concept. When we are reconciled to God, we have peace (Romans 5:1; 1 Corinthians 7:15; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:16). No longer being alienated from God, we have freedom (Romans 6:22; Romans 8:2; Galatians 5:1) and sonship (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). In Romans 5:8-10 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 reconciliation is used in conjunction with righteousness of God (justification). They both demonstrate an activity on the part of God in removing the barrier of sin that alienates people from God.”*

Considering those things that Smith wrote, I want to point you again to his words: “*Since God has taken the initiative in removing our hostility toward Him, it is incumbent on us to take action in overcoming the enmity that exists between us and others.”* This is important, folks. We are encouraged in the scriptures to imitate Christ and the truth is, Christ came to reconcile enemies. **What does it say about us, when we fail to do the same?**

I think back to our message from week 3 when we looked at verse 11; specifically, those words “steadfast” and “patient.” I want to remind you again that Paul wrote those words under the context of enduring trial, hardship and less than desirable relationships. Yet his underlying message concerning those things was one of victory and triumph. **How are we able to stand in victory and triumph? Christ. The same way that we can take the first step in reconciling broken relationships in our own lives: Christ**. Remember, Paul is combating a plethora of issues in the Colossian church, but **his answer for every problem is the all-sufficiency of Christ.**

Where do you need to take the first step this week towards reconciliation?