

Reconciliation

DAVE BAST

We still get the daily newspaper at our house. How quaint, you're thinking. Our newspaper still publishes advice columns like *Dear Abby*, which I often glance at. It is surprising...or maybe it's not surprising...how often the advice people are seeking has to do with strained or broken relationships. Marriages, families, friendships are disrupted or outright ruptured by people giving offence or taking offence at others. Is there any way to restore broken relationships? Yes, there is. It is called reconciliation, and that is the spiritual discipline we are looking at today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, now we are approaching the end...we have one more program to go yet in this series...but a second series on the spiritual disciplines. So, we have already covered some of the real basic ones that come to mind, like fasting and prayer and keeping the sabbath; and in this second series, we have been sort of looking at things that people might not especially think of as spiritual disciplines; nevertheless, they are.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; one thing we may not think as a discipline, although maybe this one is a little easier to see as a discipline because it so clearly requires overt work; and that is what you said in the introduction, Dave. Reconciliation—to reconcile—to restore a relationship. You hear this word in different circumstances. Sometimes if...in the United States...if the House of Representatives and the Senate pass similar bills, but they are not exactly the same, they have what they call a reconciliation, where they bring the two bills together and they make them match...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You hear it more often in court, or about divorces: Can you reconcile? Can we avoid this divorce? Can you two reconcile with each other?

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or enemies, and so forth.

DAVE BAST

Even in accounting it comes to mind...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, you reconcile the books.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you have to reconcile your figures if they don't add up the first time; and reconciliation as we think of it scripturally is one of the great works of God; it is one of the things God does, and one of the things that he invites us to imitate him in seeking ourselves. So, there is a great passage in 2 Corinthians 5. It is rather famous, actually, in the New Testament, that describes God's work this way:

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ^{19a}that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

^{19b}And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you, on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. So, indeed, from 2 Corinthians 5, a well-known passage. Basically, we are going to be thinking about on this program that reconciliation has a vertical access and a horizontal one. This one is primarily talking about the vertical one between us and God...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is not literally above us, but we always think that way, right? So, this is how we get made right with God through Christ, who was not sinful, but became sin for us. I always think that is an interesting phrase there. We looked at it, I think, in a 2 Corinthians series here on *Groundwork*. He *made* Christ sin...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He became sin for us, and that opened the door to reconcile with God, from whom we were estranged...separate...because of sin.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; there is another great verse from Colossians 1, where Paul says: verse 20 paraphrased God was pleased to reconcile to himself *all* things, whether on earth or in heaven (this kind of universal reconciliation) by making peace through the blood of Christ's cross.

So, yes; it was a costly act on the part of God. It is one of the fundamental images for salvation itself—our salvation, but also the renewal—the redemption—of the creation—the new heavens and the new earth. All of it took place because God took the initiative by coming in the person of Jesus...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Paying this terrible price that somehow...and nobody has plumbed the depths of this...how the cross actually works...but somehow it accomplished this that needed to be done in order to re-unite us with God. So, that is vertical reconciliation; and Paul says we are ambassadors—we are commissioned to proclaim this message.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we are Christ's ambassadors...a nice image, right? The ambassador represents the head of a country...he is not the head of the country, but is appointed by a president or a king or a queen...a sovereign...to go to another country, and you essentially represent the president or the king or the queen, and that is us. We represent God, and so we call people to become reconciled with God through the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. So, this is evangelism, essentially...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is witnessing and calling people to jump on the bandwagon and join God's program.

DAVE BAST

Right, because it takes two to reconcile, and we are going to pick up that theme a little bit later when we talk about horizontal reconciliation, or reconciliation among humans...among ourselves; but it is interesting that Paul says God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation, which is, as you said, the gospel, Scott...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, if we are given to the discipline of reconciliation, it means evangelizing; but, the message of reconciliation needs to be accepted; and so, Paul goes on to say: 2 Corinthians 5:20b paraphrased Therefore, we appeal, be reconciled to God. In other words, accept your acceptance, because if you turn your back on it, you remain unreconciled.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and Paul, in 2 Corinthians, uses some other images, too. He will say that we are the aroma of Christ, we are supposed to be appealing. We are like a letter of recommendation sent from God to other people. He uses a lot of nice images, but the idea is the same: God has made a path available to come back to the Creator, from whom we fell away because of sin, and that path leads through the cross, through the sacrifice of Jesus, and through that we are reconciled to God; and we call others to join and believe the gospel so they too can have their sins put away and be reconciled to God. That, as we said, Dave, is the vertical access, but what about among one another? Is there a carryover of this to our human relationships? There is, and we will think about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And Scott, today we are talking about the spiritual discipline of reconciliation, a work that we are called, I think, to give ourselves to. There is a reason it is a discipline. It is hard...it's not easy; and we have just been seeing how God is the ultimate reconciler in Christ. He has reconciled us and the world to himself, and he has entrusted to us this work as well; and at the beginning of that passage that we read from 2 Corinthians 5, Paul says:

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

That person is part of the new creation; and as new creatures...part of a new creation...there is a new way of life that we have relationally that we are called to, and that is why reconciliation is so important for us to pursue.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in this world in many situations, for reconciliation to happen there also has to be peace. Reconciliation would be founded on the fact that there has been some sort of a rupture...some sort of a broken relationship...somebody who is at odds, a friend who has become an enemy or an old, longtime enemy; and so, even in the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5, Jesus, in one of the beatitudes: ^{verse} 9Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. And so, in a world of war, a war of words, sometimes a war of armies, we are called to make peace as the children of God that we have become by becoming that new creation you were just talking about, Dave. We make peace.

DAVE BAST

Everybody wants peace, I think, deep down. We long for peace in a world of conflict. Scott, I am sure you remember the famous musical by Leonard Bernstein, *West Side Story*. It is a retelling of the Romeo and Juliet tale of star-crossed lovers, you know, from these different backgrounds and different groups that are at odds. Probably the most famous song in *West Side Story* is...it has become an American classic: *There's a Place for Us*, and it includes these lyrics: Somewhere, a place for us; peace and quiet and open air. Hold my hand and we are halfway there. Somewhere, somewhere we will find a new way of living, we will find a way of forgiving, somewhere.

As Christians, you know, I would like to say that somewhere is found in Christ, you know. It is found in us. Is all we can do just hope for peace and hold hands and wish for someone somewhere to bring us something? No; we are called in Jesus' words to be peacemakers. As such, we show ourselves to be the children of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it reminds me of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, you know, their song: All we are saying is *Give Peace a Chance*. Well again, you said that the opposite of a peacemaker is a troublemaker...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And usually if somebody is a troublemaker, we usually conclude there is something not right with that person. I mean, nobody should want to thrive on chaos; nobody should want to thrive on warfare and open hostility. It sometimes seems like we do these days, especially on social media where we are just sniping at each other all the time, but it is not a pleasant way to live. But, right, Leonard Bernstein, you know, somewhere there is peace. Or give peace a chance, John Lennon. Well, how are we going to do that? Well, again, Dave, Christians think we have a roadmap...we think we have a model to follow, and that is Jesus. So, if we are going to be a peacemaker, what does it mean? What do we have to do?

DAVE BAST

Well, I think one thing you have to do, aside from deciding you want to commit yourself to this, is recognize that there is going to be a price to pay, because peacemakers...mediators...reconcilers...those who step in between two sparring groups or two at-odds people, are often going to get it from either side or both sides at once. I think of two of the great peacemakers of the 20th Century...the late 20th Century...the Israeli prime

minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and the Egyptian prime minister, Anwar Sadat. Each was assassinated, and in each case by hotheads or radicals from his own people. So, we need to recognize again, Jesus, the ultimate peacemaker, what did it take for him...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Where did it lead him?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, look where he ended up. If you are going to step into the middle of a conflict, right...and Jesus, by the way, is also called our mediator, and that is exactly what a mediator does. A mediator steps into the middle of a conflict, and right...usually gets shot at from both sides for a while, right? Before the reconciliation is finished, the one who would be a mediator—a reconciler—is probably going to make enemies of both parties, at least for a while. Maybe eventually all hostilities will go away; but if you love peace...I think that is one thing we want to say...if you are going to be a peacemaker, you have to be a peace lover first. You have to really, really be committed to what we just said. Nobody likes a troublemaker because they don't seem to love peace very much...they seem to like it when people are at odds or are mixing it up and, you know, getting down in the mud; but we have to love peace. If we do love peace, Dave, I think another implication of being a peacemaker is that you are going to be committed to some level of justice...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have done a whole series on justice...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Here on *Groundwork*, but justice is often the cornerstone of peace.

DAVE BAST

Right; if you are asking what does it take to be a peacemaker, we could say courage, because it could be dangerous, it could be risky. Wisdom would be another thing I think that is really required or demanded, because, as you point out, Scott, you know, there is a phrase: No justice, no peace...N-O justice, N-O peace; and you can also say: K-N-O-W justice and K-N-O-W peace. So, peace is not appeasement. Peace is not giving everything to one side and nothing to the other. Peace is not going to be achieved by failing to recognize the claims that sometimes need to be made, and sometimes need to be asserted; and so, sometimes we have to go to war to achieve peace as nations. Certainly, that was the case in World War II. So, great wisdom is required, too, if we are going to give ourselves to this discipline.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think, too, Dave, that we recognize that peace is ultimately tied to that key Hebrew word, shalom; and by the way, in our final program in this series on fellowship, we are going to see some real connections here. We cannot have fellowship as a Christian community or as a world without having it built on reconciliation, but shalom takes a lot of work. As we have said before, Neal Plantinga has pointed out that shalom is the mutual webbing together of *all* creatures and *all* people into mutually edifying relationships. Everybody builds up everybody else. Well, that takes a lot of work to do that. If we are going to have a full-orbed shalom, it is going to involve a lot of work in a lot of areas. It could involve creation care...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Taking care of... It will involve fighting poverty, getting clean drinking water to people, making medical care available and vaccines available, and peacemaking is work!

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, we are talking about reconciliation among people, but what about reconciliation with the creation...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That has been abused and polluted? So, yes; there is a fullness to this work and much is demanded, but you know, so far, we have been kind of talking big picture and mediating and conflicts between nations and statesman politicians who might have a role in peacemaking, but what about us? Let's come right down to the personal level: What do I do when I have offended someone or someone has offended me—when I am in a broken or ruptured relationship? What does Jesus call me to do? That is what we want to talk about next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork* and this sixth program in a seven-part series on various spiritual disciplines, and today the discipline of reconciliation...of making peace, of bringing together two parties that have become estranged from each other. We said, Dave, that this begins with our being reconciled to God. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, that work was done through the cross; but that vertical dimension...our connection to God...then spills over onto the horizontal plane of our lives; and we thought a lot about peacemaking, almost in more global terms in the middle of this program, but now as we close it, let's get personal. Let's bring it down to the level of the Church and of what has to happen there.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we have said...already we have hinted at the final program in this series, on fellowship. The Church is meant to be a fellowship of people who are reconciled to God and to one another. Well, is your church always like that? Is my church always like that? Sadly, no. Instead, the Church also can be a place, even a source, of conflict—interpersonal conflict; and Jesus knew that. Jesus, of course, had something to say to his followers about that. Listen to this passage, for example, from Matthew 5, from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says:

²³Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ^{verse 26 paraphrased} “And you won't get out,” Jesus says, “until you have paid the last penny.”

So, some very practical, pointed advice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nicholas Wolterstorff has often said that worship in the absence of justice is nauseating to God; and here on a more personal level, Jesus is saying that worship while you are willfully not reconciled with somebody that you must have hurt, because somebody has something against you, and let's assume it is something legitimate, and you haven't tried to fix that, well, then you should do that before you keep trying to worship,

because otherwise there is maybe something false. Now, I think we should say there are certain relationships in life that we cannot fix. Sometimes we were at odds with someone who dies before we have a chance to apologize, or sometimes people just tell us to, you know, take our apology and, you know, put it away because I don't want to hear it, I don't want to talk to you. So, it is not as though you can never ever worship again. The point Jesus is making is you have to try.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There has to be the effort, and many times it is going to be successful; but if you have hurt somebody, go and apologize and then...now, with a good conscience we can keep worshipping.

DAVE BAST

It is definitely in the context of worship that Jesus sets this example, this possible situation that he suggests, because he says: You know, you're standing there with your offering in your hand. That is clearly a scene in the Temple...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Where the worshipper is bringing perhaps a thank offering. We will talk about that in the next program. But all of a sudden, they remember: Yes; oh, my brother-in-law is not talking to me because I made him so mad when I did that one thing, or didn't do that one thing or...it is as though Jesus is saying: You stand to sing the first hymn in the service, and all of a sudden, that pops back into your mind, that broken relationship. What do you do about it? And Jesus suggests...you don't literally have to walk out of church maybe then and there and get on the phone, but he says in effect, don't just let it sit there; don't forget about it; don't dismiss it. You go. There is another situation he suggests when the same thing needs to be done.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now we jump ahead to Matthew 18...well-known chapter...here you are the offended one; you are not the offender, but you have been sinned against: ¹⁵“If another member of the church sins against you,” Jesus says, “go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶If you are not listened to, then next time take two others along with you. ¹⁷And if they don't even listen to them, well then tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

So, try your best to convince people, and this has sort of been seen as a blueprint, almost, Dave, for how to handle these things in the church. We should point out here that the use of the word *church* here is a bit of an anachronism. There was no church yet when Jesus spoke these words, so Matthew probably inserted that to apply what Jesus did say; but you have to try, and if they won't listen just to you...just keep it private at first, right? But then, widen it and widen it...but what I have always liked about this passage, Dave, is at the end it says: Well, now, if he won't even listen to the church, then you treat him like a Gentile and a tax collector. A lot of times when we read that we think: So, then, that is done, right? We are done with them. No; how did Jesus treat Gentiles and tax collectors? They were always the first... So, it is just sort of like...

DAVE BAST

Still love them, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Hit repeat...hit repeat...

DAVE BAST

Yes, hit repeat; and by the way, how do you treat Gentiles if you an ambassador of Christ? You share the message of reconciliation again...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

But what I find so interesting...I have long thought this, Scott. For years and years, as a pastor especially, you might be called to mediate. Maybe it is a marriage or some other situation where there is a problem among people; or if it is you yourself, whether you have been offended or whether you have done the offending, Jesus says the same thing. You go. Those two words: You go. So often, you know, we will hear somebody say...or we will think ourselves...well, it is up to them to make the first move because they are the one...they are in the wrong, you know...I am not going to say anything to them...I'll never speak to them again until they come and apologize. No, Jesus says, you go; and that is where reconciliation becomes a discipline and where it becomes hard, because I am stubborn and I am proud and I don't want to have to swallow that and go, you know, maybe get abused again; but Jesus says quite simply: You go.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and to bring this full circle, Dave, our reconciling with one another...our engaging this as a spiritual discipline with our fellow church members or our friends or our co-workers or our family is founded on Jesus having done that between us and God; and as many of us know, right after that passage we just read in Matthew 18, there is the parable of the unmerciful servant, a man who was forgiven a debt of a billion dollars, but then goes out and chokes somebody for fifty cents he owed him and threw him into prison. The point of that parable being...of course, it is a hyperbole...it is an exaggeration...but the point being, God already forgave you an incalculable sum. How petty of us to then turn around and make life miserable for others for vastly less important matters.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As God has done, so you go do. That is the idea. This is the family style of God. If we are children of God, as peacemakers, as we saw in Matthew 5 earlier in the program, then this is what we do.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and let's maybe give the last word to Jesus, and also from the Sermon on the Mount: ^{Matt. 5:44}I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the just and the unjust and sends his rain on the righteous and unrighteous. ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the discipline we try to pursue through reconciliation. Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study the scriptures better to understand the spiritual discipline of fellowship. Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com. Share what *Groundwork* means to you and what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

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