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Be Reconciled to God

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2 Cor 5:14- 6:1

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

NOW all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. We then, as workers together with Him, plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain."

There were two things that stood out to me when I read that passage a few weeks ago-- the particular phrase "Be reconciled to God" and the word "Now".

I think it would be smart at this point to include a few definitions of the word "reconciled" just to make sure we're all starting out from the same place. According to the dictionary on the dashboard of my computer (which is one of my favorite gadgets!) the word "reconciled" means:

To cause to co-exist in harmony.

To restore friendly relations between.

To make (one account) consistent with another, especially by allowing for transactions begun but not yet completed.

To settle

It's the 3rd of those definitions that got my attention. And although it's using the word "reconcile" in what we would consider to be a more financial way-- like

reconciling your checkbook--, it also rings true of us in Christ.

It says 'God reconciled us to Himself in Christ.' He no longer imputes (attributes) our trespasses to us. Why?? Because through the Cross, God put an end to our deficit in the body of Christ and made a way for us to come into relationship with Himself through Grace.

This is maybe a little crude, but it's like the work of the Cross in us continually administers fresh doses of the Death and Life of Christ our way. The atoning flow of Christ's blood to every member of His Body is what both cleanses away impurities and becomes the vehicle to living by His Life.

You know that verse "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"? Well to me, that fits in perfectly not with God giving Christians fast cars or bigger houses...It fits in with Reconciliation.

As flesh, we start from a place of huge spiritual deficit, yet God takes the vast riches that are found in Christ and through the eternal and active work of the Cross, He cancels our debt and actually deposits His riches into in our spiritual account...I know this is a little tacky, but you could say the name of the bank is The Cross, our withdrawal slip is called Faith, and the actual transaction itself is called Grace and the result of going to the bank is called Reconciliation. (I told you it was a little tacky!)

So Paul writes to the Corinthian church to remind them about what God accomplished at the Cross possibly because he could tell they'd forgotten about it. It was apparent to him they weren't walking in the purpose for which they'd been saved, which verse 21 states is to become the righteousness of God in Christ. It was like Paul was desperate for them to lay aside their personal and corporate fleshy troubles by remembering all flesh was dealt with at the Cross. And with flesh completely out of the way, there was nothing to prevent them from walking in Purpose. In fact, all that was left for them to do was to be reconciled to God in Christ. To let their hearts, minds and lives "agree" or line up with who God they'd become 'Now in Christ'.

Paul said "The love of Christ constrained him"...The firm tenderness of Paul's words to the Corinthians revealed how his whole being ached with desire for them to know the Truth, because he knew that if they would come to know it, they'd be able to live in such a deep and abiding union with God and one another. Seeing what is true for us NOW in Christ is like having one great big beautiful Spiritual Door open up before us, and having thousands of tiny, troubling fleshy doors slam shut behind us at the exact same moment!

And that is some of what keeps coming in front of my eyes these days. I've been feeling this call to be reconciled to God, but not because we're fighting or anything. It's more like the Lord has been saying to my heart "Julie, you keep thinking your deficit is too huge. But I've taken care of all the reasons you might think you'll never make it...What you don't have-- which is everything-- I have. And I'm happy

to give it to you. So whether it's the lack you see in yourself that's causing you to stop or the lack you see in others, the Cross has effectively removed all the excuses. And now what is left for you to do is to let what I've done find a home in you. In other words, be reconciled to Me."

I've been seeing that what God did at the Cross has huge ramifications -- REAL ramifications-- for me...for us...for right NOW. "Now" has been a very important word to me lately.

This is kind of funny-- at least to me!-- but a few weeks back there was some talk around here about the difference between a "teaching" and a "sharing". And since then, I've felt this weird pressure to not SHARE on Sundays, but to teach. (and can I just say right here that I don't think I am a teacher. Like it or not, I'm much more of a "sharer" :)

Anyway, ever since writing my name on the schedule for this morning, I've been all twisted up inside trying to decide if the things I see qualify as teachings and are thus worth sharing or not. Now that is my little weirdness, I'm sure, but suddenly it seemed so important to me that if I can't teach, at least I need to share only things that are true of Him-- things that are eternal and will transform hearts and minds-- and not things of me...

And normally on Sundays the things I talk about come from where I'm currently reading in the bible...If I'm in Deuteronomy, well then I'll talk about a story that came alive or whatever...It always seems to have a personal application, but I'm still able to point to a specific passage of Scripture that not only "validates" my personal application, but speaks beyond me, too.

Anyway, I've been reading through the book of Judges-- because I'm reading the Old Testament straight through-- and frankly, not much has come alive for me there.

Of course, I thought about just switching to an "easier" book, but I didn't want to, darn it, because it had kind of become about the point! "I am reading the Old Testament through in order, doggone it!, and the same Jesus that's spoken of in Deuteronomy is spoken of in Judges! So there is no logical reason I shouldn't be able to see SOMETHING of Christ in it!" That was my thinking on it.

Besides, I wanted to make sure that today you all felt like you got a teaching...Something from the Old Testament...Something very type and shadowy...I wanted to see something cool so I could "teach" you about why Samson tied the foxes tails together and put a lantern between them...or why Gideon's fleece got wet one time and was dry another...Because I knew it all had to mean something, you know?

Well I got so frustrated trying to find "teachings" to share with you this morning, that I finally gave up. And although I noticed some interesting details and repetitive themes and things I know speak of Christ in typical type and shadow language, I

had very little of anything real to say after finishing the whole book...

Yet every time I'd get quiet inside and think about what HAS been becoming more real to me, I'd keep coming back to seeing how for us-- for those of us who are in Christ-- everything has changed... nothing will ever be the way it used to be. And how that is such good news...And I keep feeling this pull to live with my heart inextricably tied to that awareness...So I thought today-- teaching or not -- I'd try to help you all see and feel it too. :)

Before Judges, when I was in Joshua, I'd read the familiar story of Achan. It's in Joshua 7 and it's about where Joshua sent people to spy out a city called Ai...They discovered there weren't a lot of people there...so they decided they didn't need to send the whole army to fight them-- they'd win with only a few thousand. Well long story short, the Israelites were soundly defeated, which caused everyone to panic because here they'd thought they were going to win every battle because now that they were in the Land, the Lord was doing the fighting for them.

Well they cried out to the Lord and He answered and revealed to them that there was sin in the camp-- some accursed thing was in their midst-- and that it would be impossible for them to stand against their enemies until they removed the accursed thing from among them. He told them to sanctify themselves and the next day He'd begin the process of revealing just where the problem was. So they did.

And the next day the Lord started narrowing down the guilty party by first pointing out the tribe he was from...then which clan...which family...which household...Can you imagine the suspense?! And then finally man by man they were brought before the Lord until the bible says "Achan was taken." gulp!

In verse 19 it says "Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I've done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

So Joshua sent messengers to Achan's tent, and it was there, hidden in the earth in his tent, just like he said. So they took the stuff, ran back to Joshua, and all of Israel took Achan, the garment, the silver and gold, his family, his donkeys and oxen and sheep, and his tent, and went to a place called the Valley of Achor-- which means "trouble"-- and said "Why have you troubled us?" And they stoned everyone and everything that belonged to Achan, and burned them with fire, and covered them with a heap of stones.

After they did all of that, it says the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger...and told the people "Not to be afraid, but to fight against Ai now...and it would be given into their hand."

Ok...I read that and my first thought was "Gee whiz! Poor Achan! Didn't his confession count?! It was almost misleading the way Joshua said to him, 'My son, tell me what you've done'...almost like he was saying in a fatherly way "it's ok...just acknowledge your sin and everything will be fine." So Achan trustingly told Josh the truth...and met his unfortunate demise anyway!!"

And it bothered me a little, even though I knew it shouldn't, because I couldn't help putting myself in Achan's place. I know there are "accursed things" hidden beneath the earth in my 'tent' too....

Well the more I thought about poor Achan, the more clearly I saw what the problem was...and why such quick and harsh action was taken that day. It all seemed to stem back to a couple of things:

1. When I read that story, I tend to see all the people it mentions as individuals. Not only do I think of Achan, I think of Achan's wife and how she had to suffer for his sin, when she didn't even do anything wrong! To be fair, thinking along those lines is understandable, when you look at Israel and measure everyone's actions as individuals.

But here's what I'd forgotten. It's really simple. Israel wasn't a group of people anymore; people who were measured by the individual goodness or badness they brought to the table. Back in Egypt, when those Hebrew slaves went into the house with the blood on the door and ate the lamb, in effect, they died. No one escaped the judgment God was passing on all flesh, it's just that those who didn't choose to die in the lamb died in Egypt. Simple.

And while the casual passerby would have looked and seen a massive group of bodies walking out of their houses the next morning, God took one look at them and proclaimed "Israel is My Son." HE didn't see many individuals, but One Son. And from that moment on, God related to and dealt with them that way, through the lens of One Son.

And because now is a good time to say it, that's STILL how He relates to those of us who are in Christ today. Think about the Israelites going into the house with the blood on it and eating the lamb and who came out in the morning, while I read what Paul said in 2 Corinthians: *"that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh."*

2. Another thing which caused me to be little offended was that no one seemed to care that Achan was sorry for hiding that stuff. But I'd forgotten where they were. They were in the Land now. Again, just like at Passover, when they crossed the Jordan River, everything changed. I guess what I'm seeing here is something of the finished nature of being in Christ being expressed through the swift and unbending retribution brought upon Achan.

It seems to me that the reason there was no patience or room for anything "accursed" dwelling in the midst of the camp was because everything that needed to be done *had* been done. Spiritually speaking, the story had been finished and no more plot was left to unfold. They were in the Land, therefore the rules of the Land ruled.

It had been both a long journey and only a 3 day journey, but nevertheless, they finally WERE where God promised! They'd arrived in the Land! Israel had come into their inheritance through the Son and God had come into His through the Son! And although in one respect we can see a progressiveness in how so much of the Land was yet to be possessed, the reality was that the Land God gave them was already fully theirs.

And I think it was precisely that Finished-ness of the story that necessitated the immediate ousting and annihilation of anything wasn't in the final version. God wasn't mad at the person of Achan. Or his wife, for that matter...But the things Achan gave his heart to and tried to find a hiding place for 'in the earth of his tent' were basically things that belonged to another way of life....And as such, they just couldn't be allowed to stay in the Land-- even if no one knew they were there. God, the Author and Finisher of the Story, had already closed the book...and His story said that nothing other than the Life of the Son was allowed to live there...

So for Achan, it wasn't a matter of rehabilitation or of him not being sorry enough or making promises that he'd never do something like that again. The story of Achan is a picture that broadcasts the fact that there's no mixture in Christ. Nothing of flesh. Nothing foreign, because Christ was the fullness of the Land.

You know how when JW was here he talked a bit about the Fullness? What he said seemed to link so perfectly with this story to me because I could see that Achan's "trouble" was he forgot Who was the fullness of the Land, so he brought in the life of another.

If you're like me, I'm so used to hearing Eph 1:23 which says "The church, which His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." that I'm practically inoculated from the truth of it...But I guess it was just hitting me that while it's true we are His Body, Christ is the *fullness* of His Body. Christ is the fullness of every fiber...every cell...every system...every impulse....It all consists of and is defined by Him-- there's no room for anything or anyone else. And when I forget that Christ is the fullness of His Body, Achan's trouble becomes my trouble too.

Remember when JW showed us that verse in Exodus 40:33, 34, 35 where it talks about the finishing of the tabernacle? It says they went to the tabernacle of meeting and came near the altar... They washed just like God commanded and then Moses raised up the court and hung up the screen and finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle...and not even Moses, the *friend of God*, was allowed to enter the tabernacle because it was already filled. Filled with what?? It was filled up with the fullness of the glory of the Lord.

And the word "fullness" inherently conveys the understanding that there's no room for anything in it but itself. This sounds like a riddle, but true Fullness can only be full of itself!

Hopefully you're following me so far...And if you are, right about now a little problem starts to surface. We believe Christ is our Life and that we are His Body-- and possibly even that He is the fullness of His body...But then what do I do about Me? And what do I do about You? We don't always act like His fullness, do we?

And right HERE is where we should be falling in love more and more with the work of the Cross in our lives and hug it to ourselves as if our very life depended on it-- for truly it does. The Reconciliation that Paul was trying to get the Corinthians to comprehend is the best news ever and begins for us at the Cross. It's established in our hearts again and again at the Cross, and will never be found anywhere else in the universe except at the Cross!

And like JW said, the Cross is where God displays the Nature, Character, Beauty, Sacrifice, Mercy, Triumph, Strength, Obedience etc., of the Son....It's as if at the Cross, the Father gathered up the pieces of Christ that had been on display throughout time-- every word that was spoken, every deed that was done; all the prophecies, the types and shadows, the laws and sacrifices-- and when time was full, He gathered them all up and put them on display in one single Hour...An Hour Paul calls "NOW"... And when we come to the Cross, JW said it's like the Father takes that Hour and everything of Christ that was on display for His eyes alone, and places it right inside of us. And then He reveals that Son in us...And depending on the need of our soul, He appears and we see Him as He is and that His vast riches have become the supply of our need!

And if we stay at the Cross and keep looking, we'll start to see glimmers of the New Creation, the Church. And though we'll see we're hidden in Christ, we'll comprehend that we aren't the fullness of His Body -- HE is!! And understanding that will make all the difference because instead of seeing and knowing one another after the flesh and getting all hot and bothered when we don't like what we see, the Cross will put out of view what isn't Christ and doesn't belong in Him-- just like Achan was first judged and then hidden by a pile of rocks....And as He increases, we'll decrease.

The Cross is central and essential. It's how we got where we are and how we remain there.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that you guys, if we're in Christ, things have changed forever for us. We've been bought with a price, and for a reason...God has taken care of all the obstacles and now the Spirit is calling us to come to the acknowledgement of what He's done and be reconciled to God. And we need to remind one another about what is Real, and let Faith take us where this goes-- together-- as one Man...And when trouble comes, whether personally or corporately, and when we can't see the truth clearly, we need to encourage one another to run TO the Cross and not from it. Why? Because we've walked into the

middle of a finished work and there's nothing left to be done except let the story play out.

I'm not quite sure how to end this. I guess I'll just go back to the beginning and say what Paul said to the Corinthian church, mostly because I'll never outgrow the need to hear it: When One died for all, then all died. And Christ died for all that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. So now we no longer know anyone according to the flesh because if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. NOW all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And He's given us the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, let's not receive the grace of God in vain. Let's be reconciled to God!