

## A Note on Current Events: September 6, 2024

I originally completed this reflection on reconciliation prior to the mass shooting tragedy in Georgia on Wednesday, September 4, 2024. In light of this unspeakable event, it is hard for me to offer a direct path for those affected to deal with such immense pain. Reconciliation and forgiveness will no doubt be deeply personal and extremely difficult for those grieving. If I were delivering this as a sermon today, I would urge us to turn to God, as only He can provide the comfort and guidance needed to confront such loss.

Becoming reconciled with someone who has wronged us is one of life's greatest challenges. We've all been hurt, sometimes violently, sometimes slowly over time. Isn't our first reaction often to strike back, to assign blame? Forgiveness, if it comes at all, usually feels like the last thing on our minds. Yet, the first step toward reconciliation is to turn to God. Through Christ's sacrifice, we are freed from the consequences of our separation from God's grace and drawn back under God's umbrella of love. Without experiencing God's love, we cannot truly extend it to others.

The narrative below is my second attempt to bring the Gospel message of reconciliation to shed light on this recent tragedy.

## Scriptural Inspirations

**2 Corinthians 5:18-19:** "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 people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

**Romans 5:10:** "For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!"

**Colossians 1:19-20:** "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."

## The Gospel Message of Reconciliation With God and Neighbor

### Introduction

In a world fractured by division, violence, and suffering, the Gospel offers the healing power of reconciliation. But what does reconciliation mean in our spiritual lives? Why is it central to our journey with God?

## PREACHING THE GOSPEL: RECONCILIATION

At its core, reconciliation is the restoration of a broken relationship. Scripture, particularly in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, illustrates how God initiated reconciliation through Christ, mending the bond that separation from His grace had shattered. Romans 5:10 underscores that even while we were estranged from God, He reached out to us through His Son, reconciling us to Himself. Colossians 1:19-20 teaches us that Christ's death on the cross made peace between God and all creation.

These scriptures will guide us as we reflect on reconciliation and its implications for our faith.

### The Nature of the Broken Relationship

To appreciate reconciliation fully, we must first understand the brokenness that necessitates it. In the beginning, humanity lived in harmony with God, walking with Him in perfect fellowship. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed, that harmony was shattered. Their rebellion was more than a simple error; it was a profound breach of trust with God. The consequences were immediate: fear, guilt, and separation from God's grace.

This alienation extends beyond Adam and Eve. Romans 5:10 tells us that all humanity, before reconciliation, lives in a state of estrangement from God. We are spiritually adrift, burdened by guilt and a deep sense of disconnection—from God, from ourselves, and from one another. This is the human condition: fractured by separation from God's grace and in need of restoration.

Yet, despite our brokenness, God's love for us remained steadfast. He longed to restore the relationship that separation from His grace had damaged.

### The Gospel as Reconciliation

The Gospel is the ultimate act of reconciliation. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the barrier between humanity and God was dismantled. His sacrificial death on the cross paid the price for our separation from God's grace, while His resurrection guaranteed our new life in Him. Colossians 1:20 captures this beautifully: "Through Him, to reconcile all things...by making peace through His blood."

Christ's redemptive work restores our relationship with God. The separation from His grace, which once distanced us from Him, is no longer a barrier. Through faith in Christ, we are justified, not just legally but relationally. We are brought into communion with God as His beloved children.

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 remind us that reconciliation is a divine initiative. God, in His grace, reached out to us first, offering reconciliation even when we were still distanced by our separation. Importantly, this gift comes with a responsibility: the ministry of reconciliation. We are called to be ambassadors of God's peace, sharing the message of reconciliation with others.

In this restored relationship, we experience God's peace. It is a peace that surpasses understanding, rooted in the knowledge that we are loved, forgiven, and secure in our relationship with God.

## Reconciliation in the Face of Tragedy

### Emanuel AME Church, Charleston, South Carolina

On June 17, 2015, a tragic event shook the nation. Nine people were killed during a Bible study session at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. This horrific act of violence devastated families and a community grounded in faith. Yet, despite the unimaginable pain and loss, several family members of the victims chose to forgive the shooter during his bond hearing.

Their decision to forgive, to express their hope for his soul, and even to pray for him was a profound act of reconciliation. In the face of one of the worst forms of human evil, these families embraced the message of Christ: that forgiveness is not something earned but given freely, just as God forgives us. Their example stands as a powerful witness to the healing power of reconciliation—one that transcends human instincts and points to something greater, something divine.

### The Recent Tragedy in Georgia

And now, we are faced with another incomprehensible act of violence—this time at a high school in Georgia. How will the families and community members reconcile their loss? I don't know. I don't think it's humanly possible to reconcile ourselves to such a loss. The grief, the anger, the questions—it all seems insurmountable.

But the key word here is “humanly.” It may not be possible to reconcile this tragedy through human strength alone, but through the sacrifice of Christ, reconciliation becomes possible. Christ's death and resurrection remind us that even in the darkest of times, there is hope. Through Him, we find the strength to forgive, to heal, and to experience peace. While we cannot begin to fathom how those affected by the Georgia shooting will find their way through the pain, we trust that with God's help, reconciliation, though difficult, is possible.

## Implications for Our Spiritual Journey

Reconciliation with God transforms our spiritual lives. First, it redefines our identity. Romans 5:10 speaks of the dramatic shift that occurs when we move from being enemies of God to being His children. Our new identity as beloved sons and daughters of God shapes how we live, giving us the confidence to walk in His love and grace.

Reconciliation also invites us into an ongoing, deepening relationship with God. This is not a one-time event but a continual process of sanctification, where we are conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ. We are called to live lives of repentance, continually turning from separation from God's grace and seeking to embody the fruits of the Spirit.

In practical terms, reconciliation means experiencing God's presence daily. It means drawing near to Him in prayer, immersing ourselves in His Word, and gathering with other believers in worship. These practices help us cultivate an intimate relationship with God, where we can experience His peace and presence in a tangible way.

This peace, which comes from being reconciled to God, is a deep and abiding sense of well-being. It carries us through life's storms, assuring us that we are held securely in God's love. This peace also extends outward, shaping our relationships with others.

## Our Call to Be Agents of Reconciliation

Reconciliation with God also carries a divine responsibility: we are called to be agents of reconciliation in a broken world. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, Paul emphasizes that the ministry of reconciliation is central to our mission as Christians. Just as God took the first step to reconcile with us, we are now tasked with extending that reconciliation to others.

In today's world, fractured by conflict, division, and pain, the need for reconciliation is more urgent than ever. We are called to be peacemakers, reflecting God's love and forgiveness to those around us. Whether it is in our families, workplaces, or communities, we are to embody the reconciling love of Christ.

Living out this ministry of reconciliation means more than preaching the Gospel. It means actively pursuing peace in our relationships, offering forgiveness, and seeking to heal divisions wherever we encounter them. It calls for humility, empathy, and a deep commitment to bridge the gaps that separation from God's grace has created.

## Conclusion

Reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel. Through Christ, God has restored our broken relationship, transforming our identity, and calling us into a life of peace and presence with Him. As recipients of this grace, we are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, bringing God's love to a world in need.

Let us embrace this calling with humility and courage, trusting in God's strength as we strive to be agents of reconciliation in our daily lives. May we walk closely with God, reflecting His love and peace in all we do.