

Sunday, June 30, 2013—Do People Go to Hell With Their Sins Forgiven? Investigating the Claims of the New Reconciliationists

Introduction

- A few months back I began to notice some funny teaching amongst Grace Believers on Facebook (FB). I first encountered this when someone said that they were FORGIVEN of their sins 2,000 years ago when Christ died on the cross. Then, about four weeks ago, I read a posting where someone was teaching based upon II Corinthians 5:17-21 that people die and go to hell with their sins FORGIVEN because God has already reconciled the world unto himself.
- I have since termed this view of II Corinthians 5:17-21 New Reconciliationism (NR) because it manifests a “new” understanding of the subject than has historically been articulated by members of the Grace Movement. Historically, O’Hair, Stam, Baker, and other founding members of the Grace Movement did not hold this view of reconciliation that is currently being embraced in some quarters.
- About two weeks ago, after asking around about the doctrine’s origin, I posted a warning on my FB page about NRism. The following is a sampling of quotes from people on FB who are advocating for this doctrine.
 - “Sorry Bryan, what we believe is not NEW at all..Paul taught it 2000 years ago, to say a believer pays in hell for sins already paid for??? NOW THATS a new teaching.”
 - “Why do we need the ministry if everyone already is reconciled??? because they need to know they are just like if I deposit a MILLION into a poor persons account, don’t you think they need to know it’s there. Otherwise they die poor, even though they are a millionaire.”
 - “Saying sins are paid for but not forgiven until you believe is like saying your money in the bank is not yours until you write a check.”
 - “HAVING SINS FORGIVEN PAVES THE WAY FOR A PERSON TO BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.”
 - “Jesus Christ only DIED FOR YOUR SINS, if you BELIEVE the gospel. So if you DON’T believe the gospel, then Christ didn’t die for your sins? Hmmm”
 - "Unbelief IS a sin. Anything that "misses the mark" is a sin. Good news = Jesus paid for ALL sin, including a sin that is called "unbelief." In this dispensation, a person does not go to hell because of their sin. They go to hell because they do not believe Paul's gospel. - Not because of ANY sin. If one sin sends someone to hell, then ANY sin would send someone to hell. And when we are talking about unbelief being a sin which sends a person to hell... let's be clear: The reason why unbelief would send a person to hell is not "BECAUSE it's a sin." The reason why would be because it is the opposite of what you

need to access the gift of grace. BELIEF (FAITH) = ACCESS to the gift of grace. NO BELIEF (NO FAITH) = NO ACCESS to the gift of grace. It's not a sin issue. That was settled at Calvary. Now that's GOOD NEWS!"

- Aside from the fact that many of these comments don't make sense, as far as I can tell, the advocates of this new doctrine believe that the entire world was RECONCILED to God and FORGIVEN of all their sins 2,000 years ago when Christ died upon the cross. However, if you don't realize that or believe that, you are not JUSTIFIED, and go to hell with your sins forgiven.
- This is a very strange doctrine because it borders on Universalism, but in the end it is not. Universalists believe that everyone, even Satan and fallen angels, will in the end be saved. While this view teaches that all of humanity (to my knowledge Satan and his angels are not included) was already reconciled to God, it still has people dying and going to Hell, but with their sins forgiven. Over the past couple weeks I have done some extensive reading on the subject and cannot find anyone in church history who taught a similar doctrine with the possible exception of Karl Barth and the Neo-Orthodox theologians.
 - “A second weakness of Neo-Orthodoxy apparent to the Evangelicals was its sidestepping of the conversion question. Implicitly here was the doctrine of universal salvation most readily perceived in Karl Barth. In Neo-Orthodox theology, the Church does have an obligation to proclaim the lordship of Christ; but this proclamation rests on the underlying assumption that the world is, in fact, already reconciled to God. People who are not yet aware of God's mighty deed of reconciling the whole human race would benefit from this knowledge of what God had accomplished. (Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals*, 14)
- This explanation sounds eerily similar to some of the bank account illustrations currently circulating on FB as quoted above.
- In its current manifestation, NRism seems to have developed within Grace Circles and is currently being accepted as “Pauline Truth.” In my opinion, this makes it a particularly insidious and sneaky leaven because it masquerades as though it were the teaching of the Apostle Paul. Those who have questioned the wisdom and Scriptural basis for this teaching have been accused of being non-Pauline or not following Paul. Full-blown Universalism is easily answered by Pauline Truth. In contrast, NRism is a sort of de facto universalism couched in mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalism thereby making it particularly dangerous.

Defining Words

- II Corinthians 5:18-20—in these three verses, Greek words related to *reconciliation* occur 5 times.
 - Verse 18—reconciled (*Strong's* 2644) “1) to change, exchange, as coins, for others of equivalent value: a) to reconcile (those who are at variance); b) return to favor with, be reconciled to one; c) to receive one into favor.”
 - Verse 18—reconciliation (*Strong's* 2643) “1) exchange: a) of the business of money changers, exchanging equivalent values; 2) adjustment of a difference, reconciliation, restoration to favour: a) in the NT of the restoration of the favor of God to sinners that repent and put their trust in the expiatory death of Christ.”

- Verse 19—reconciling (2644)
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- Verse 20—reconciled (2644)
- Reconciled—“brought into friendship from a state of disagreement or enmity; made consistent; adjusted.” (*Webster’s 1828*) This word is past tense and speaks of those who have already been brought into friendship from a previous state of enmity.
- Reconciliation—“1) the act of reconciling parties at variance; renewal of friendship after disagreement or enmity. 2) In Scripture, the means by which sinners are reconciled and brought into a state of favor with God, after natural estrangement or enmity; the atonement; expiation.” (*Webster’s 1828*) This word speaks of the act of taking two parties that are at variance and settling the enmity between them.
- Reconciling—“bringing into favor and friendship after variance; bringing to content or satisfaction; showing to be consistent; adjusting; making to agree.” (*Webster’s 1828*) Once again this word speaks about the active process of settling the differences between two parties.
- Those that are working on settling their differences are said to be in the process of “reconciling.” “Reconciliation” does not occur until both parties have settled their differences and put away their former enmity. At which point one can say they have “reconciled.”
- What the meaning of these words teach is that reconciliation is both a process and two sided. One party might be willing to be “reconciled” and take steps and actions towards that end. However, it is not until the second party desires to be “reconciled” and agrees to settle their differences that one can say “reconciliation” has occurred. Therefore, God can take the necessary steps (sending Christ to die on the cross for sin) that MAY result in one’s eventual reconciliation to him, but it is not until one agrees with him about their problem (sin) and accepts God’s provision for it (the blood of Christ) that one is ACTUALLY reconciled to God. Just because God is no longer at enmity with mankind based upon the cross work of Christ does not mean that humanity is not at enmity with him. As long as enmity exists within one or both of the parties COMPLETE “reconciliation” has not occurred.

Who Is Reconciled and Who Is Not?

- Verse 17—the only person who is a new creature is the one who is “in Christ.”
- Verse 18— in this context, who is the “us” that have been reconciled to God? Paul and the believers in Corinth i.e., those who are “in Christ” in verse 17. Because Paul and the Corinthians have already been reconciled to God and had been given the ministry of reconciliation.
- Verse 19—the major contention of New Reconciliationism centers around the sense in which God reconciled the world unto himself (more on this below). If this means, as New Reconciliationists maintain, that every person has already been reconciled to God individually, then why bother committing unto Paul and the Corinthians the ministry (verse 18) and word of reconciliation (verse 19)?

- Verse 20—once again, if every person has already been reconciled to God 2,000 years ago when Christ died upon the cross, then why bother beseeching people in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God? If the reconciliation spoken of in II Cor. 5:19 were individual and not dispensational, and each person's individual sins were already FORGIVEN, why bother committing to the Corinthians (and us) "the word of reconciliation"? If all were already forgiven and reconciled by the work of Christ, what do we make of Paul's exhortation to be "ambassadors for Christ" (v. 20) and to be "beseeching" the world to "BE RECONCILED TO GOD"? It is senseless to beg them to be reconciled to Him if in fact they already are in right relationship.

What is II Corinthians 5:19 Talking About?

- The primary meaning of II Cor. 5:19 is dispensational not individual. Paul is speaking about the basis upon which the body of Christ can be formed and the individual reconciled to God.
- Romans 11:11-15—is the primary cross reference for II Cor. 5:19. It was through the fall of Israel that Christ brought about the reconciling of the world unto himself. When Israel was rendered in unbelief (Acts 7) and fell from their favored "Time Past" standing, there was no longer any difference between Israel and the Gentiles. This allowed for God to reconcile the world unto himself without distinction through the fall of Israel.
- Christ accomplished this upon the cross and no one knew about it until the Pauline revelation was made. The mechanics by which the body of Christ could be formed were brought about by Christ's work upon the cross.
- Ephesians 2:13-18—the provision that accomplished the reconciling of Jew and Gentile and the formation of the one new man took place 2,000 years ago upon the cross. Please note the fundamental components of our definition of reconciliation in these verses:
 - Verse 13—the Gentiles who were far off in "time past" are brought nigh by the blood of Christ.
 - Verse 14—Christ's work upon the cross made peace between these two parties (Jew and Gentile) that used to be far apart from one another. Christ broke down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile and made them both one, thereby doing away with the basis for their former enmity.
 - Verse 15—the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross abolished the former enmity and took the law of commandments out of the way (Col. 2:14). The purpose of this was to form the one new man (body of Christ) and bring peace (reconcile) between those who used to be at enmity with each other.
 - Verse 16—it is here that the reconciliation spoken about in II Cor. 5:19 was accomplished. The world was reconciled to God through the fall of Israel (Rom. 11:15).

Without the cross work of Christ, God could not form the one body of this dispensation. The enmity is slain through this work of Christ.

- II Corinthians 5:19-20—it is in the dispensational sense that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Rather than imputing sin and pouring out his wrath upon “humanity” his wrath was poured out on Christ upon the cross, thereby providing the basis upon which the church of this dispensation could be formed. In other words, at the cross God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself in the sense that God was moving on our behalf through the work of Christ to make our reconciliation unto him possible.
- Another word we need to define in this context is IRRECONCILABLE. According to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*, the English word irreconcilable carries the following meanings: 1) Not to be recalled to amity, or a state of friendship and kindness; retaining enmity that cannot be appeased or subdued; as an irreconcilable enemy or faction. 2) That cannot be appeased or subdued; as irreconcilable enmity or hatred. 3) That cannot be made to agree or be consistent; incongruous; incompatible; as irreconcilable absurdities. It is followed by with or to. A man's conduct may be irreconcilable to or with his avowed principles.
- In human terms, people get divorced every day in this country citing IRRECONCILABLE differences as the reason for their separation. In other words, the forces that separate the two parties cannot be overcome thereby restoring the relationship to its former standing. Whenever there is infidelity in a marriage the question is often asked can the two parties reconcile their differences. If one party desired to be reconciled, they may even take steps toward that outcome such as ending the adulterous relationship, seeking marriage counseling, rehab, or the like. However, just because they desire to be reconciled back to their spouse and may be taking the necessary steps for that to happen does not automatically bring out the desired reconciliation. The other party has to be willing to end the enmity and be reconciled.
- What Christ did upon the cross as revealed through the pen of the Apostle Paul is take care of God’s IRRECONCILABLE differences with humanity. Christ paid the price for our reconciliation but each human being needs to be willing to end their enmity with God and accept the provision that God has provided through Jesus Christ.
- Reconciliation should be regarded as a process according to God's purpose that involves two parties, not an accomplished fact for the whole world. It is God’s desire to save all, but all will not be saved. The sense in which the whole world is reconciled to God is POTENTIAL, not ACTUAL. That is, Christ's death for all human beings made them RECONCILABLE to God: otherwise, Paul would not be calling on them to BE RECONCILED TO GOD (II Cor. 5:20). What the first Adam did by bringing legal condemnation to all humanity is reversed by what Christ, the "last Adam," accomplished--the SAVEABILITY (POTENTIAL JUSTIFICATION) of every one. ACTUAL SALVATION and forgiveness of sins does not come automatically but by an act of faith in the finished work of Christ.

- This does not mean that our sins were FORGIVEN 2,000 years ago but that our sins were PAID FOR 2,000 years ago. It is still necessary for every man, individually, to be reconciled to God.

Humanities Reality

- Ephesians 2:1-3—man, by nature, is born dead in trespasses and sins (verse 1) and therefore is by “nature” a child of wrath (verse 3). I Cor. 15:22 states, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Paul teaches that all of humanity inherited the fallen nature of Adam and is therefore “in Adam” at birth: dead in trespasses and sins, with God’s wrath abiding upon him. We are not born automatically reconciled to God.
- Romans 3:23
- Romans 5:1—peace with God is only possessed by those who have been justified by faith.
- Romans 5:8—every person reading this was still dead in their sins when Christ died for them. Every person reading was born dead in sins even though Christ died for them 2,000 years ago.
- Romans 5:9-10—“now” that we have believed the gospel of Christ, we are “justified by his blood” (verse 9). Before we were justified by faith (verse 1) “we were enemies” of God , according to verse 10. Even though God settled his IRRECONCILABLE differences with us 2,000 years ago and made us RECONCILABLE, we were still by nature God’s enemy because of inherited sin. Therefore, we are not RECONCILED TO GOD in verse 10 until after we have been JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD in verse 9. The only thing God will accept is perfect righteousness. Therefore, we are not reconciled to God until the righteousness of God is imputed to our account when we are justified by faith.
- Romans 6:23—therefore, we are born into a reality in which provision for our sin problem has been made and THE PRICE HAS BEEN PAID IN FULL, but we are still prime candidates for the wrath of God upon entrance into this life. Why? Because justification, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life are the gift of God through Jesus Christ. By way of illustration, at Christmas time I go to the store and PURCHASE gifts for my children. I pay the required redemption price on their behalf. Therefore, on Christmas morning, the gifts have been PAID FOR but they do not BELONG to my children yet because they have yet to receive them as their own. It is not until they receive the gifts and appropriate them as their own that they belong to them even though I PAID FOR them on their behalf.
- Romans 3:24—so it is with our salvation. Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ PAID FOR all our sin. In doing so he made us RECONCILABLE or SAVEABLE. Before that payment can be placed to our account we first have to receive the gift of salvation by grace through faith as our own. When we acknowledge our sinfulness and realize that we cannot save ourselves and we rely and trust exclusively in the shed blood of Christ and his resurrection from the dead as the total

and complete payment for our sin we are justified, reconciled to God, baptized into the body of Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption, blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, and seated in Christ at the right hand of God far above all principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This is the other side of the reconciliation coin.

- Ephesians 2:8-9—until we by faith receive the gift and trust the provision that Christ made on our behalf, we remain dead in trespasses and sins with God’s wrath abiding upon us. Christ once and for all time put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; but only those individuals that by faith apply that provision to their own personal sin account are reconciled to God.
- Just because God was “not imputing their trespasses unto them” does not automatically mean that he was imputing his righteousness unto them. The Imputed righteousness of Christ (justification) is given to any person the moment they acknowledge their sin and trust the shed blood of Jesus Christ as the only total and complete payment for their sins. Justification must precede reconciliation. **NO ONE IS BORN INTO THIS LIFE ALREADY RECONCILED TO GOD.**
- People die and go to hell every day having their sins PAID FOR but no one dies and goes to hell having their sins FORGIVEN. Forgiveness is not granted until the gift has been accepted.

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