

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
“The Ministry of Reconciliation”
DR. BRUCE BICKEL
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Gracious Lord, we come with a humble spirit this morning, with a great sense of awe and anticipation, trusting that You will open our eyes, that we might behold You more clearly, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

How many of you here are pilots, like I am? Anybody fly, besides myself? (A blind participant raises his hand, resulting in uproarious laughter.)

Participant: He raises his hand for everything.

Bruce: Well, let’s try that again. (More laughter.) How many of you fly? Well, I think you all realize and recognize with me and agree with me that flying can be an exhilarating experience, as long as both wings are in coordinated flight. You know, when you put your stick over to the left, the left wing goes down, the right wing goes up. A nice coordinated flight. When you put your stick to the right, the right wing goes down, the left wing goes up. A nice coordinated flight. But when the wings are not in coordinated flight, they don’t work.

Participant: What do you mean, wings? Oh, flying airplanes; I’m sorry.

Bruce: Yeah, flying airplanes. (Laughter.) Airplanes have wings. (Laughter.) Just because you’ve broken a couple of them in your aerobatic days, that’s all right. (Laughter.) My point is this, that when things are in coordinated flight, they work well. And Paul has been teaching us about some coordinated flights in our life in Christ in the New Covenant. All of life is about grace, and there are two covenant wings that he is talking about. One would be dependency, and the other would be eternal perspective.

Let’s take a look at our passage, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, beginning with verse 16, reading from the English Standard Version. 2 Corinthians 5, beginning at verse 16. “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake, He made Him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Paul is teaching us that the Christian life is basically like an airplane. It has a fuselage, which is grace. All of our lives are about grace, and one of our flying wings in our life experience in the New Covenant would be dependency. We’re absolutely dependent upon God. You can see that in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 5. And the other wing, I would suggest, would be one of an eternal perspective, seeing God working

sovereignly in our lives. We can see that in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 7. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God.”

Now as long as you keep those two wings in balance, you’re going to have a wonderful flight. Where we run into a problem is when we come to the point of witnessing. That’s when we become unbalanced in our lives. And one of the areas that causes us most of the problems, in my mind in the Christian faith, especially for men, is in this area that we would call witnessing for Christ. It’s in evangelism that we begin to fly like a one-winged airplane. You are not quite sure what to do, so you do nothing, because you’re not sure you can do it as well as somebody else.

You become a Christian, and somebody tells you that you’re an ambassador for Christ, and the first thing you think you need to do is to go do something. Now unfortunately, we spend too much time telling people what to do, rather than telling them what to be. The world says this: Go do something so you can become someone. The Christian faith says, become someone so you can go and do something. We’ve just got to reverse it around. You’re not quite sure of what to do in evangelism or witnessing, so you do nothing. And then you choose to feel guilty. And so you start looking to yourself and not depending upon God, and you have a one-winged airplane, because you’ve lost the dependency upon God. Who alone is adequate? God alone is adequate. He is the sufficiency for all the things that we do. And what are you left with, but a one-winged evangelistic airplane, because one of the two ideas—it depends upon me—has now imbalanced the wing of the airplane, which says that it all depends upon Him.

So, because we’re flying in what I would call uncoordinated Christian flight, we begin to trust ourselves, and not the grace of God. So we begin to think this way: I can’t do that. I can’t witness, because I can’t do it as well as somebody else does. I don’t know as many Bible verses, so I can’t do it as much as they do.

So the first thing we do, normally, is that we go out and buy somebody else’s book, to find out how they do it. And then we try to look at their results, and we begin to think, This is what they did. If I do the same thing, I’m going to get the same results. And so, all of a sudden, we become plagiarizers in what we think is fake evangelism, because we’re flying an imbalanced flight, because we are essentially trusting ourselves rather than trusting God, and we’ve lost the eternal perspective.

Paul has been teaching us that there is a proper balance between our Christian lives and our witnessing and our evangelism. He says, That’s not the way that evangelism works. He’s already given some instructions on proper evangelism in the passage that we have been looking at in 2 Corinthians 2, 3, 4 and 5. First of all, he says that the proper attitude is preaching Christ and not ourselves. That’s the message. It is the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. So the first thing we need to understand, if we’re going to be trusting God, is to have the right message. And Paul says that it is always preaching Christ, and Him crucified, and not ourselves. It’s a God-centered message, not a man-centered message.

And then the second thing we are reminded of in those verses is that we leave the results to God, and we don’t become manipulators to get a response. Notice the number of times you water down what you say because you want to get a certain response. Paul

says that that is an imbalanced flight plan, because one of your wings is not depending upon God, and you don't see an eternal perspective.

Paul says, "We commend ourselves to each man's conscience, and in the sight of God." And he has taught us by teaching us so far that we prove our message by the actions of serving the people to whom we proclaim Christ. Now he says there is a proper balance as evangelism and ministry take place, and that God will use you with all of your personality and your abilities, and he can do it because it all depends upon Him. How do you know that? Look at verse 18 of chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians. Paul is saying, Look! The Lord is going to use you. He's going to use your personality. He's going to use your abilities. He's going to use your skill sets in a very, very unique way, because He has given you a very unique ministry. And how do we know that? Look at verse 18. "All this is from God." What is all this from God? Go back up to verse 16. You've got new attitudes. Notice verse 16. "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh." You change your view about God and it changes your view about people. That's where ministry starts. He changes your view. You've got brand new attitudes, and then you've got new attributes in verse 17. You're a new creature. The old is gone; the new has come. So he starts with new attitudes, and He gives you new attributes. And then, finally, He gives you qualifications to be in ministry.

Now Paul explains it by teaching what God does to us, in verse 18. "All this is from God," and then what God does through us in verses 19-21. And so, what Paul is really summarizing, after he has just taught us what it means to be a new creature in Christ—we have new attitudes and new attributes—he now begins to say, I'm preparing you to give away what I've given you. We've talked about ministry over the years as giving away to someone else what God has given us. That's what Paul is teaching us in this passage.

And so we can outline this by looking at these verses. Verse 18 is what God does to us, and then verses 19-21 is what God does through us. Now giving a ministry is giving away to somebody else what God has given us. Until you understand what God has done to you, you have no idea what God will do through you. So we can look at this as preparation for ministry, and then the presentation for ministry.

So look at verse 18. Notice that God initiates the preparation by reconciling us to Himself. That's where it starts. It starts with reconciliation. Our ministry begins by understanding what God has done to us. To reconcile means to restore harmony and friendship. If God is going to use us in ministry and evangelism, He is going to have to restore our relationship and our friendship so that we are qualified to give away the message that He gives us. It isn't one side giving in, or reaching some common agreement. That is not reconciliation. Reconciliation is not two people coming to agreement. It's something much more dynamic and powerful.

Literally, the Greek word for reconcile means to bring into conformity to a standard. It was a term that was used in the Greek marketplace. People could reconcile their weights by bringing them up to a set standard of measurement. So you would bring things up to a set standard of measurement, and that was called reconciliation. That is essentially what God does to us. He brings us back up to a set standard. And who is the

standard? Jesus Himself. And that is what He does by reconciling us. He brings us to a set standard. So what God initiates, in bringing us to a standard, is His standard.

Now let me explain this for you, how this works. We need to understand the context. Before the Fall, God and man walked together in harmony and friendship. Man's sin destroyed that beautiful harmony. God was alienated from man because of man's sin and our rebellion. God now views sinners as His enemies, and is justly offended with them. Take a look at Psalm 5, verse 5. "The arrogant cannot stand in Your presence; You hate all who do wrong." And then you take a look at Isaiah chapter 59, verse 2. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

Now the Hebrew concept of "face" means presence. And so, if you go back and set the two concepts, your sins have hidden the presence of God from you, and He does not listen to your prayers, that's a rather serious indictment, isn't it?

And how about Romans 5:10? "For if, when 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 by His life?" Notice, when did He reconcile us? It's when we were His enemies, not when we were in harmony. Sin has destroyed the harmony of the Garden.

Now that is what is so mysterious and glorious about the concept of reconciliation, that the first overtures of peace are not made by the offender. They are made by the offended Person. Who initiates reconciliation? God does, because He is restoring us back to His standard. He takes the initiative. He is the offended party. I just read you some of the verses of how He views us. It is in the midst of His perceiving you and I to be His enemies that He chooses and He initiates the concept of reconciling us, restoring us back to His standard. God takes that initiative. God is the One who initiates the reconciliation between rebellious traitors and Himself. The reconciliation comes from God as a gift of His sovereign love, and His sovereign grace.

Now let me tell you why we cannot initiate reconciliation. That is impossible for us to do. Look at Romans chapter 1, verses 29 and 30. Here is a description of the people whom God chooses to reconcile. "They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful. They invent ways of doing evil, they disobey their parents." Now that's why we cannot initiate reconciliation to a holy God. He is the only One who can reconcile us. Notice, it says that we are reconciled to Him. It doesn't say that God is reconciled to us. He is the One who takes the initiative in reconciling us. That is how He prepares us for ministry. Man cannot initiate reconciliation to God.

How about Romans chapter 3, verses 11-18? "There is no one who understands; no one seeks God." No one seeks God, and yet we have a movement in Christianity known as what? Seeker friendly churches. Well, that's a term that is contradictory to the Scripture. "No one seeks God," we are told. And yet, we have adapted services of worship to appeal to people who can't seek Him? I don't understand the issue there. No one seeks God. Yes, Don?

Participant: I think the issue is that our culture—liberal churches or the culture in general—assumes that God loves you, that there is no need for reconciliation.

Bruce: Exactly right. We have no understanding of the need for reconciliation. That's why I'm spending time on that this morning. We need to understand what God has done *to* us before we can really understand what God can do *through* us. If you don't understand this concept of reconciliation, you have no idea what ministry is, because notice, He has given us what? The message of reconciliation. In other words, you need to understand what He did to you, so that you can tell somebody else what He did to you, and that is what He can do to them. Do you see how that works? We've been given the message of reconciliation.

So, we cannot initiate reconciliation. God does that Himself. Man is so depraved that he does not know how to desire God or to seek Him, or even begin the concept of reconciliation, or doesn't even have thoughts about it. You see, in our society, we don't even have thoughts about being reconciled to God, because we don't think that there is a need to be reconciled, because we don't understand the standard. Reconciliation is bringing us back to an elevated standard of which God is Himself. If it is going to happen, God must initiate the reconciliation for the sinner. Romans chapter 5, verses 8 and 10: If, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to God through His death, then how much more will we be saved through His life." Yes, please?

Participant: To me, I just understand that, that's why, when you first come to Christ, that your testimony is very important, without even knowing what the Bible says. You can tell somebody else what He did for you, and how you came to be reconciled to Him, and so a testimony is very critical for new Christians.

Bruce: It is, but it also needs to be biblically correct. Just because you've had an experience, your experience is not going to convert anybody. Just because you came to saving faith through some nice experience is not going to convert anybody. What will convert them is what? The truth behind your experience. That means you've got to be Biblically correct. So when you do develop a testimony, make sure that it is Biblically correct and accurate, because that is what is going to bring somebody to saving faith, not your experience. We've got to be careful about that. Yes, Ted?

Participant: That would tend to make you be less aggressive with your personal testimony, because when you're young in the faith, you really don't know the Lord.

Bruce: Correct. That's when you need to have somebody help you with that. There is wisdom in the counsel of many brothers. If you are putting together your testimony of your conversion and your regeneration, go to somebody who can help you to be Biblically correct, so then you can share your experience and have the meat behind it, which would be the accuracy of the Biblical message. So those two things need to be very important.

God must initiate reconciliation for the sinner. Now notice: Reconciliation does not primarily refer to man's attitude toward God, but God's attitude toward man. Man is reconciled to God; God is not reconciled to man. God's alienation arises out of His just wrath over man's sin and rebellion, and therefore He is the only One who can initiate reconciliation.

And catch this. Now this is what I want you to understand in summary. By reconciliation, God's alienation is removed, because His wrath is appeased through the sacrifice of Christ. What God initiates from Himself, He accomplishes through Christ. Look at verse 18. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself." It is through Christ that we are reconciled.

Now there are three words that I want you to understand, and bear with me as you go through this. But it's very important, brothers, that we understand what we're talking about when we talk about God initiating reconciliation. There are three words we need to understand. The first one is the word propitiation. That removes God's wrath and God's anger. God is propitiated. That means He is appeased. And how is He appeased? He is appeased because of the sacrifice of Christ. His law, His standard, was met, therefore God's anger and wrath against sinful people is appeased. He has been propitiated because He is appeased because of the sacrifice of Christ. Notice verse 18. We are reconciled through Christ to Him. That's propitiation. That focuses on God's wrath. God's wrath must be removed, and that is done through the sacrifice of Christ. This is what is known as propitiation.

The second word is the word reconciliation. That removes God's alienation, because He is appeased through Christ's propitiation. In reconciliation, God is appeased because of propitiation, and therefore the alienation that He has against us is removed. So propitiation removes the wrath and anger; reconciliation removes the alienation because of the sinful relationship, because He has been appeased because of what? Because of the sacrifice of Christ. See Romans 5:10. We were reconciled to Him through the death of Christ. That's propitiation and reconciliation. Reconciliation is the removal of the alienation of the relationship, and restoring us back to the standard of the pre-Adamic fall. And that is accomplished because of the propitiation of the sacrifice of Christ. God has been appeased because of Christ's sacrifice. That is why you and I cannot initiate reconciliation. We cannot remove the wrath. Only God can do that through the sacrifice of His Son.

And the third word is expiation. That removes our sin and guilt, by Christ offering Himself in our place. So the three words are propitiation, reconciliation and expiation. Expiation focuses on the removal of our sin. Propitiation focuses on God's wrath, reconciliation focuses on God's alienation, and expiation focuses on the removal of our sin. Those are the three things that make reconciliation possible: expiation, propitiation, and reconciliation. Because of Christ's sacrifice, God is appeased. Do you see that? God is appeased because of the sacrifice. That's why you and I cannot initiate reconciliation. We cannot appease God. Only He can do that through the sacrifice of Christ.

And we are reconciled! The Puritan John Flavel describes it this way. "Reconciliation is nothing else but the making up of the ancient friendship between God and man, which sin had dissolved, and so to reduce these enemies into a state of sweet agreement." You see, that is what happens through reconciliation. God removes the wrath, removes His alienation, and then He restores us to the standard of sweet agreement in a relationship

with Himself, because He reconciled us to Himself. Now let's consider that when we apply this to ourselves personally. Any questions on those three words? Yes, please?

Participant: How do you spell expiation?

Bruce: E-x-p-i-a-t-i-o-n. That has to do with the removal of sin and guilt. Reconciliation has to do with the removal of the alienation of the relationship. Propitiation has to do with the removal of the wrath and justice of God through the sacrifice of Christ. Yes, Don?

Participant: It's interesting to me, Bruce, that a lot of Bible translations, particularly modern translations, don't have the word propitiation anymore, which is unfortunate, because propitiation says a whole lot.

Bruce: Absolutely. Propitiation deals with the focus on God's wrath. That has to be appeased, and that is why you and I cannot initiate reconciliation. It is only the offended party who can initiate reconciliation, because He is the only One who can appease Himself by removing all of the alienation. That's reconciliation. Yes, Karl?

Participant: Is that also the same propitiation that we see in 1 John 4:10?

Bruce: Read it, please.

Participant: It says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Bruce: Absolutely. That's exactly what it is. Through the sacrifice of Christ, God is appeased. Propitiation means God is appeased, and how is He appeased? Through the sacrifice of the Person and work of Christ. That's why Romans 5:10 is so important. And again, let me read it. "For if, while we were God's enemies," at that moment, there is alienation. You're an enemy; you are alienated from the character and presence of God. "We were reconciled to Him." To whom? To God. "through the sacrifice of Christ." That's propitiation. God is appeased through the sacrifice of Christ. God initiated the restoring of our friendship with Himself, and He accomplished that through Christ's sacrifice about two thousand years ago. So we enter into, by faith, the reconciliation which Christ accomplished for us. You and I by faith enter into what? That reconciliation which Christ accomplished for us. You and I do not initiate that reconciliation. We, by faith, jump into and participate in something that God has already done for us.

Now notice: the One who initiates is the One who bears the pain. The Lord, who initiates reconciliation, bears the pain. He pays the price, He pays the cost, because He is the sacrifice. Do you see? The One who initiates reconciliation bears the cost of it. It's painful. But He's saying that the relationship is so important that I'm going to restore you back to that standard. I'm willing to be the sacrifice, in order for the appeasement to be accomplished, and the alienation to be removed. The One who bears the pain is the One who initiates the reconciliation.

Now notice how the verses say this in our Scripture. What God initiated, He completes in us, and gives us the ministry of reconciliation. Now notice, we've come full cycle. We who were once the objects of God's alienation are now the ministers of God's reconciliation. We've come full cycle. We were alienated. And now, the One who alienated Himself, because of our sin, becomes the One who will be the messenger

because of what happened to you. So what God initiated, He accomplished through Christ, He completes in us, and gives us the ministry of reconciliation. It comes full cycle.

Let me read this from one theologian by the name of Philip Hughes. This is about ministers of reconciliation. “In Christ, God’s holy and loving work of reconciliation has been accomplished once and for all. It is because the way of reconciliation now stands wide open, that the ministry of reconciliation has been committed by God to His servants. There is no service or ministry to mankind more crucial or urgent than the exercise of this ministry of reconciliation. As God does not cease to be the sovereign Creator, and man does not cease to be His creature in desperate need of redemption, this ministry, with its message of reconciliation is, in the ultimate issue, the one thing needful for our world in all circumstances and in every generation. It is man being reconciled to God.” That’s what happens. God initiates this in us. He completes the reconciliation as we enter into it by faith. And now, He says, You’ve got something to give away. That’s preparation for ministry. How does God prepare you for ministry? By reconciling you to Himself. That’s what He does to you, so He can do something through you. Yes, please?

Participant: So take that sense of reconciliation of Christ to us to us as men, as leaders of our families, in relation to our spouses and our children.

Bruce: That was my next statement. Thank you. You’re a good in man, Dick. (Laughter.) Now, you received reconciliation. What do you do with it?

Participant: Give it away.

Bruce: Give it away! Now that means, practically, in my relationships with humanity—my family, my business associates, and society in general—I have something to give away that they may or may not understand, and that is the ministry of reconciliation. The Scripture says this: If you know, you go. The issue never is who is right or wrong in an alienated relationship. Scripture never says that you’ve got to go if you’re right, but you don’t go if you’re wrong. It doesn’t say that. It says this: If you know that you’re a sinner, and that a brother has sinned against you and has something against you, you go from the altar, the communion table, and go to be reconciled. In other words, if you know that there is an alienated relationship in your life, you and I have the responsibility to what? Go and reconcile that relationship. Restore it back to a standard. If you know, you go, and vice versa. Matthew 18 says this: If you know somebody has sinned against you, what do you do? You go. Either way, if you have been sinned against, or you have sinned against somebody else, you go. In an ideal world, in the Christian community, you have two people who are waiting for each other to be reconciled. So the issue never is who is right or wrong. Yes?

Participant: Is there a different reconciliation between believers and nonbelievers?

Bruce: We’re talking about believers right now. Reconciliation for a nonbeliever would be his regeneration and conversion into saving faith, his being reconciled to God. Dick’s question was, taking that reconciliation, how do we apply it in our daily lives? That’s what we’re talking about. Yes, please?

Participant: We apply it to nonbelievers the same way.

Bruce: Yes, we do. But their reconciliation may be different from the reconciliation of a relationship we have with somebody else. But the point is, if I know, I go. The issue is this: it's never whose right or wrong. It's if you know, you go. Yes, please?

Participant: Are we still talking about reconciliation with the same definition as a few moments ago?

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: Bringing people to a higher standard?

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: Can you help me understand, as one who would have been offended, if the other party is not quite ready, to, say, bring himself to that higher standard, how one would then respond to that, because I understood this concept before, with two people, where there is a right and a wrong, but now, with the concept of somehow raising this to another level, through this word reconciliation, I'm all confused.

Bruce: You are not responsible for their response. You are responsible to go. That's it. Your responsibility stops right there. That's when you get an imbalanced plane, because you begin to be a manipulator and you lose the eternal perspective. This is going to be done in God's timing. That's why the two wings of an evangelistic airplane would be dependency upon God and the eternal perspective. You go to be obedient, to be reconciled. You initiate reconciliation. They may or may not respond, but it's not your responsibility. You've got to have an eternal perspective at that point, and say this. "I have done my duty, and I've been obedient. I went and gave away what I was given, because I know I offended this person, or they offended me. My responsibility was to go."

Participant: So you present the standard, and you go with the concept of being reconciled. Beyond that, there's nothing you can do.

Bruce: I go give away what God gave me. God reconciled me to Himself. Here is how it works. I'm going to go and remove the barrier to that relationship. Now who is going to bear the cost of that? I am! Who is going to bear the pain of that? I am! Who is going to pay the cost? I am! That's what reconciliation is about. I bear the pain because I am the sacrifice, because I'm saying that relationship is more important than my pain. I am the one who will bear the pain in reconciliation. Yes, Karl?

Participant: Bruce, would you speak to that a little bit, even in a little more detail, because I look at all the churches that we have now that have split. And when they split, it's usually because of attitudes, and selfishness, and somebody who doesn't want to reconcile. (unclear.) And they split.

Bruce: Exactly. I think part of the problem with that, Karl, is that we have not taught reconciliation from the pulpit. Biblical counseling occurs in the pulpit, not behind closed doors. The whole congregation needs to hear the same message, so the Holy Spirit works the same truth in the same members, so that, hopefully, that reconciliation becomes a way of life. You see, when was the last time you heard anybody talk to you about preparing you for ministry through reconciliation? We talk about preparing you for ministry to go to some class and learn about ten different things. You see, the Scripture says that you've

got to become somebody before you go do something. You become reconciled; now you're equipped in ministry, because you've got something to give away.

So, in very practical terms, (and I don't mean to be disrespectful here), but that's the problem with racial reconciliation. We've got it backwards. We think that we need to pay people back for their sins. That's restitution, not reconciliation. Who is the one who can create racial reconciliation? The one who has been offended! It's the race of people who have been offended who make reconciliation possible, because they have to remove the barrier, so that sins can be forgiven. Notice what comes first. Look at verse 18. Reconciliation comes before forgiveness. Do you see that? Look at verses 17 and 18. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses." Which comes first? Reconciliation comes before not counting your trespasses. Before the removal of sin and forgiveness can be asked, you've got to remove the barrier. That's why, when you and I go to restore a relationship that has been alienated, we are not responsible for their conduct. All we can do is remove the barriers and say, I want reconciliation to occur. Then they might be prompted to say, Would you forgive me? And you can forgive their sins. But, you see, the whole thing first is, we need to go, and we have to bear this in mind: we're the sacrifice. It's going to cost us. It's going to cost what? My pride, my ego, all those things that make me a man, and the things I'm going to have to die to, if I really want to be reconciled. Yes, please?

Participant: My situation, in the past, is that I could never reconcile with someone until I saw some repentance. If that individual didn't show me that he was repentant of the sin that he thrust upon me, I could never reconcile with him, because I didn't see any movement in that person's heart. Now, I understand that it's not his movement, but it's my movement.

Bruce: Amen! Well said! You see, that's where the eternal perspective of the winged airplane is important. The adequacy of God is one wing, and the eternal perspective is the other. This may occur in God's timing. He is in charge of the response. You and I are not manipulators. We are not reconciled to somebody because they repent. We go to remove the barrier so that the forgiveness might occur, but we don't control that. So you're absolutely right. You do not wait for them to repent, in order to be reconciled. You go, sacrifice yourself, and remove all the barriers, so that the potential will be there. It may or may not be there. That doesn't change our responsibility.

That is painful, guys! That's a cost! You're a sacrifice when you do that. But that's exactly the mirror that we see in the Person and work of Christ. God sacrificed Himself so that we would say, Forgive me. Reconciliation occurs before forgiveness. Yes, please?

Participant: This concept puts you right in the middle of where you really never wanted to be.

Bruce: Absolutely. (Laughter.) That's exactly right.

Participant: There's the opportunity.

Bruce: That's where ministry occurs! That's how it happens! That's why you've got to have the wings of your airplane in equilibrium flight. On one hand, it's this. God

alone is adequate to make that happen. And the other wing is this. As an eternal perspective, I see that it's going to be done in God's timing.

Participant: This new philosophy, for me, is extremely challenging, because all these years I've been waiting for one or more people to show some repentance. And now I realize, by taking that act, I was becoming the Holy Spirit.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: And I am not the Holy Spirit. I have to act and let the Holy Spirit do His job.

Bruce: That's the eternal perspective you've got to have in balanced flight. And God alone is adequate to do that. When you have those two wings in adequate flight, you're going to be a balanced flight. When one of those becomes imbalanced like that, you're in deep trouble. That's exactly correct.

You see, this is such a radical concept, because we've always thought it's up to them to make reconciliation possible. No, that is not correct. It's up to me! It's up to me, because that's what God did. You see, you've got to look at what God did! He initiated it when I was His enemy, so that I would repent and come to saving faith, as a result of what I see He did. Now that's why we have to do the same thing. You and I understand this. It's not based upon their response. It's the fact that I go. If you know, you go. Jesus never said, I'm going to wait till they repent. He didn't say that. He reconciled us when we were what? Enemies! I was His enemy! And He chose to reconcile me! My response, according to the work of the Holy Spirit, who applied the gospel message to me, was that I repented and asked for forgiveness. That was a consequence of God's eternal perspective. You can't lose sight of those two things, guys. Yes?

Participant: Yet Jesus never treated us as enemies.

Bruce: Excuse me?

Participant: Yet Jesus never treated sinners as enemies.

Bruce: That's correct.

Participant: He treated them with love.

Bruce: Absolutely. But relationally, they were enemies. But that didn't change His conduct. He didn't wait for them to come. He what? He initiated it. You and I should not wait for the person to come to repent. We need to go initiate it. It may or may not happen; that doesn't change our responsibility. That's the problem with racial reconciliation. A group of people are waiting for us to do something, so they can say, You're forgiven. They've got it backwards! The only way it is going to happen is if they remove the barrier, and say, We're going to remove the barrier of all the history. We're going to take that away and get rid of it. We're going to sacrifice our own racial history for the sake of something bigger than that, and that is to raise us to a standard, and that is reconciliation. Then we come and say, Would you forgive us? You see, we've got it backwards! That's why racial reconciliation is such a disaster, because we've approached it backwards. We've approached it from a human perspective, rather than a Biblical one. Yes, Ted?

Participant: I'm just wondering if you'd be willing to kind of think this out in practical terms. I'm thinking right now of a person in business who attacked me thirty

years ago. I've held a grudge against that person, and on occasion I have spoken ill of that person. And if I were to go to that person, (which is something I don't want to do), then is it a matter of saying, I felt you attacked me thirty years ago, and I held a grudge, and spoke ill of you. Would you forgive me? I mean, I'm trying to think of the actual pragmatic way of approaching this.

Participant: You said it.

Bruce: Well, I think what you said is pretty good. First of all, I appreciate the fact that you don't want to be there. You've got to recognize that

Participant: (Unclear. Laughter.)

Bruce: You see, guys, that is a very practical question Ted is asking. That's the reality of what we're talking about. You're going to have to sacrifice yourself, but you do it for the sake of what? For the sake of restoring that relationship to a higher standard than what it was.

Now, you've got to understand this. God alone is adequate to do that, and you've got to have an eternal perspective. If those two wings are in equilibrium flight, you're going to have the opportunity to have a successful mission. But when either of those two things get imbalanced, when you think you can do it yourself, or you lose the eternal perspective, that is when you become imbalanced in your flight in evangelism. That's why we have such poor evangelism, because we have one-winged airplanes. I'm going to read somebody else's book, and do the ten steps they do, because I'm going to get the same results they did. That may not have anything to do with the relationship that you need to reconcile. You see, you're being equipped, you're being prepared for ministry. And the ministry is what? Giving others the message of what just happened to you. That's what you go talk about. Let me tell you how God reconciled me to Himself. I want that to happen to you. That means I'm going to remove all the pain of the past. I'm going to bear the cost of that. I'm going to be the sacrifice. I'm going to bear the pain of that for the sake of something better, and that is to restore the alienation that's going to be removed in relationships.

Guys, that is powerful ministry, because you can't do it by yourself! This is not normal! This is not natural! This is supernatural! It's all the grace of God. Yes, Tom?

Participant: Isn't all of this transformational thinking?

Bruce: Absolutely. It is all transformational thinking. If you don't think right, you're not going to act right. Now I can't be your Holy Spirit, guys. All I'm trying to do is present to you a standard of saying this is what God did to you. And, to the degree to which you understand what God does to you will be the degree to which you will be able to do it to somebody else. You give it away. Yes?

Participant: All these years, we went with the theory of "macho macho man." And that's our downfall.

Bruce: Well, you know, you're right. "Macho macho man" is because we think it depends upon us. That's an imbalanced flight plan. One wing is gone. God alone is adequate. But at the same time, it takes a great deal of strength to go and do what I just suggested we do. You've got to be strong to do that, and strong in God's grace. Remember, grace is God's resources at Christ's expense. This is radically how we can

change personal and societal relationships, if we understood, and the church heard this message. We've got to understand what Paul is teaching us about reconciliation. He said that when we were His enemies, that's when He reconciled us, to restore us to a standard. He appeased Him by taking care of His wrath—propitiation. Reconciliation removes the alienation, and expiation removes the guilt of the sin, because my response is, Would you forgive me? That's how all three of them work together. But the last one cannot happen until the first two occur. Appeasement must occur first, then the alienation must be removed, and then the sin can be removed. So it goes in order of propitiation, reconciliation, expiation. See how that works?

Brothers, this is a message that is foreign to the church, unfortunately, because we think that ministry is something that we *do!* Ministry is something that you *are!* You are what? You are reconciled to God! Yes, please?

Participant: The byproduct of the lack of reconciliation is that all the anger in society is at a level we've never seen in this country, and it's purely from the message of reconciliation.

Bruce: Absolutely. We have it backwards. We don't understand reconciliation. And, you see, that's why it is so important, in my judgment, that the church hears this message, because we are the ones who have what? The ministry of reconciliation! The world doesn't have this ministry, because it has never happened to them! The only way reconciliation can occur is when it comes through the church, because, notice: "that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." That's evangelism. That's ministry. It's giving away what you know God has done to you by removing the wrath from your life, removing the alienation from your relationship, and putting you in a position now to seek the removal of your sins. Yes, please?

Participant: And by giving it away, that individual can now give his away.

Bruce: Absolutely. That's evangelism. It's giving away what God has given you, and when God changes that with an eternal perspective, they come to saving faith, and they can do the same thing to somebody else. You just pass it on. That's the flow of how ministry works.

Now am I teaching this to the point of understanding? I mean, are you with me on this?

Participant: We hear you, brother.

Bruce: I mean, this is something that is so radically different. We never talk about this in the church, because we're so oriented to what? Activity! I've got to go do something so I can become someone! Paul is saying, No, no, no! You become someone, (be reconciled), so you can go do something! And that is minister, and serve! And notice this. The key ingredient is verse 18. "All this is from God."

Now in Luke 17, Jesus warns the disciples to watch themselves, and not to be stumbling blocks to others. Recognize what you can do, or have done. If, during the process of reconciliation, they repent, then you can forgive them. But you won't be able to forgive them unless the situation is removed on your part. That's reconciliation. So you go, trusting the grace of God. You go and remove the hindrances to the relationship,

and let the Holy Spirit work. That's why if you know, you go, so that the alienation is removed, so you will not hold their sin against them. Yes, you'll bear the pain; you'll be the sacrifice. Christ did that for you.

Now ministry begins in our lives, brothers, when God does something to us. God initiates the removal of His own alienation by seeking us when we were helpless, when we were ungodly sinners, and we were His enemies. God accomplished the removal of His alienation through Christ. And God completed the removal of the alienation by preparing us to be messengers of reconciliation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."

But now notice: you must be in Christ to be reconciled to Him. If not, then God's wrath and alienation is still against you. You are alienated, but reconciliation is of God. You are guilty, but your pardon is of God. You are sinful, but the removal of your sin is from God. "All this is from God." That's the power of evangelism and the power of ministry. That's the ministry of reconciliation. So, brothers, be reconciled, so you can go do something. Yes, please?

Participant: (A man raised a question about reconciliation, related to Christian involvement in government.)

Bruce: It doesn't work from a human perspective. You've got to have the two wings in balance. God alone is adequate to make reconciliation possible, and you and I have got to have an eternal perspective of how it works. Now our responsibility is not to go and change our government. Our responsibility is what? Give away the reconciliation that I have received, to whomever I'm alienated against. That's what changes society. The government isn't going to do this; it can't! Quit worrying about the government! Become responsible! Be someone, so you can go and do something! If you know, you go! If it started with us, what would happen? There might be a massive movement of reconciliation, if it just started with us. That's the message of the church! That's why you've got to be in Christ to be reconciled! This is impossible to be a government issue! This is not political! It's supernaturally spiritual! It's something the Holy Spirit does! And when God does something to you, He reconciles you to Himself. You now have something to do to somebody else, and that is to go and remove the alienation in any relationship you have.

Brothers, that is life changing! It starts in our families. It goes to people in our churches. If the church began to preach this message, we could change society. But it will never happen, if we think that ministry is something we do. Ministry is something that we are. Yes, please?

Participant: What happened to me one time is that I realized that I had offended this other person. So I went to that person, and said, "I know that I've done this, and I'm sorry, and I would like to have this reconciled with you." The very next day, the pastor asked that person to help distribute Communion, and I happened to be in that line where that person was distributing the Communion. And as I approached, and went to that person, we were both just crying.

Bruce: God alone is adequate, and you've got to have an eternal perspective. Keep your wings in balance, and you'll have a good flight. May God give us the grace to do

both of those things, and not think that it depends upon us. Guys, we're talking about something that is so powerful to change our world, but it has got to start with each one of us in our own relationships. May God give us the grace to be reconcilers, so the world might change for the glory of Christ.

Let us pray. Father, we have probed the depths of Your heart and Your mind and Your soul and Your Spirit. And forgive us, Father, for our inadequacy to communicate the greater depths of Your heart. Father, deeply remind us of this magnificent concept of reconciliation. Help us understand propitiation, that You've been appeased through the sacrifice of Christ. Help us understand the reconciliation which removes the alienation of our sin from the relationship. And help us realize that the expiation is the removal of our sin and our guilt. And may it be so, Father, that You do something to us, so that we might become something for You. And all the brave men said, "Amen!"