

## CHAPTER III

# RECONCILIATION OF THE WORLD

## Reconciliation: the Use of the Word

I stated above that Jesus had little use for the word "grace" that is so central to Paul's conception of Jesus and his work. Reconciliation is another word that comes forward repeatedly to express one of the views of Paul, but which Jesus never used, or never used according to the manner of Paul. The New Testament Greek is *katallasso* and its variant forms, all of which are found in the Pauline literature. Jesus did use a similar word, *diallasso*, once (Matthew 5:24) where he counsels one who, on taking a gift to the altar remembers that his brother has something against him, to go first and be *reconciled* to his brother, then return to offer the gift. This usage serves to define the word for us, for in this context it obviously describes the process by which one who is estranged from another does whatever is necessary to make peace and restore fellowship and friendly relations. This is precisely the usage applied to *katallasso* by Paul. Only, he applied it to the process of the restoration of fellowship with God through the death of Jesus, with one exception (I Corinthians 7:11), where he counseled a woman who had separated from her husband to either be reconciled to him or remain single. In this case his use is similar to the single use of Jesus, for it applies to the process of restoring close relationships between two persons, husband and wife.

## Their Differing Views of the World

Paul's distinctive use of the word, in contrast with Jesus, results from their contradictory views on the world as explained above during the discussion of love for the world. Jesus sees the world of men as intrinsically hostile to God and therefore non-reconcilable. It is, to God, dead, and its inhabitants are dead and require, not reconciliation, but rebirth. The world hates him and it hates his disciples and he never indicated that this would change. The world is that which lies in darkness and is inimical to the light that emanated from Jesus. When asked if there are few that are to be saved, he responded,

Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able (Luke 13:23,24).

This parallels the saying from the Sermon on the Mount,

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few (Matthew 7:13,14).

Many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14).

This informs us that Jesus never expected a positive response from the people of the world, and therefore he never expected the world to change. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it was only the Prodigal who changed, or repented. His far country remained the same, precisely as the world remains the same for all time.

## PAUL: THE STRANGER

This is the pattern that underlies all of Jesus' teachings regarding this world of men. When those who find the Way are so very few, how can the world be changed by their extraction? And it is an extraction without compromise. This is clear from this prayer of Jesus:

I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world (John 17:14).

Then, speaking directly to his disciples, he said,

If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:19)

Only a few from out of the world enter through the narrow gate and onto the narrow way, while the world remains precisely the same, hating the light, loving the dark and tripping the light fantastic on its merry way down the broad way to destruction. The contradiction that is Paul's view of the world is plainly displayed in his use of the idea of reconciliation:

If their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? (Romans 11:15).

He has just explained his view that the trespass of Israel (the Jews) was necessary to the extension of salvation to the Gentiles; now he follows with the belief that the Jews, if they do not persist in their rejection, will likewise be saved:

I want you to understand this mystery, brethren; a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25,26).

This is characteristic of Paul's contorted view of things, and it shows us that he had not the slightest inkling of the world as Jesus understood it and as it stands in Truth. For him, far from being intrinsically hostile to God, the world is an entity that is reconciled to God through the rejection of the Jews! His other uses of this word are similarly incompatible with the doctrine of Jesus:

. . . that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two (Gentile and Jew), so making peace, and might *reconcile* us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end (Philippians 2:15, 16).

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to *reconcile* to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now *reconciled* in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him provided you continue in the faith . . . (Colossians 1:20-23).

All this is from God, who through Christ *reconciled* us to himself and gave us the ministry of *reconciliation*; that is, God was in Christ *reconciling* the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of *reconciliation*. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be *reconciled* to God (II Corinthians 5:18-20).

For if, while we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are *reconciled*, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our *reconciliation* (Romans 5:10,11).

I shudder when I think of how fervently I preached from these text (and sang them) as a young

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pastor. Aren't they wonderful in their expression? Therein lies the power of their deception, that and the subtle manner by which Paul bound them to the person of Jesus Christ. "We beseech you," he writes, "on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." You see how he claims to be writing on behalf of Christ a message that Jesus abhors?

Yes, indeed, they do sound so wonderful! Especially so to a young disciple burdened by a conscience greatly disturbed by racial segregation and injustice. I could only rush to them and bind them to my heart without the slightest suspicion as to their real nature.

### Conclusion

For so many long years I labored, unwilling to cast a suspicious eye on Paul. To me he seemed almost like a god. I plowed on, digging myself deeper and deeper into my torment and giving to him nothing but reverence and respect. Apart from the traumatic breakthrough for which I continually thank my Lord Jesus, I would yet be languishing in that misery. To all that are having similar experience in the world, I now have the freedom to say to you without reservation and in the name of my Lord: The problem is Paul!

His is a powerful and enduring deception, characterized by the following features:

- He preached in all sincerity what he believed in all sincerity, because he was himself deceived.
- He appealed to the better nature of all men, that part of our nature that is in the likeness of God, thus his intense focus on reconciliation and love.
- He wrote and did everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. By thus exalting the name of Jesus while contradicting him, he forestalls our doubts.
- He asserted the support of the Law and the Prophets with conviction and therefore convincingly, but erroneously as we have already seen.

He carefully defined his gospel in a way that makes sense to everyone who is willing to believe in a god who demands blood sacrifices as atonement for sin. It made sense to Jews and Gentiles in the First Century, and continues to do so today.