

## THE GOSPEL IN STEP 9

The story is told in 2 Samuel 11 and 12 of David and Bathsheba. David, the king of Israel, catches a glimpse of Bathsheba bathing, lusts after her and decides he must have her. The problem is that she is married to one of his best friends and most valiant warriors, Uriah the Hittite. This does not stop David – he has relations with Bathsheba, she gets pregnant, and in an effort to cover up, David has Uriah set up to be killed in battle.

Now let's assume David comes to the realization that he has sexual purity issues and starts going to Celebrate Recovery at the Temple in Jerusalem. The prophet Nathan runs the CR ministry and becomes David's sponsor. And as David works the steps, he realizes he has to make some amends. Who does he owe amends to? He owes amends to Bathsheba; perhaps to Uriah's parents; perhaps to the commanders who were forced to set up Uriah to be killed in battle.

David faithfully works step 8 – he made a list of all those he had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all – and we find his list in Psalm 51. **There is one name on the list** - the Lord. All that was wrong with David – his ego, his lust, his lying and abuse of power – was an affront first of all to the God who had been so faithful to deliver him from his enemies and exalt him as king of Israel. And you could say that he had “harmed” God because he had “harmed” people who God really cared about (since He really cares about all of us).

Making amends is one of the most powerful parts of the Twelve Steps – going through step 9 is truly a blessing. You will feel freedom, forgiveness and

peace. But how do you make amends to God? Is He even on your list of people you have harmed?

We talked last time about an important synonym for amends – the word “atone.” The reality is we cannot make amends to God, even if we wanted to. Our sin has created a barrier that blocks any attempt we could make. But the great news of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ has made our amends to God on our behalf. He has atoned for **our** sin. Jesus is an “atoning sacrifice.” We used a really big religious word that means atoning sacrifice – propitiation.

And because Jesus was put forward as a propitiation, we are **justified** through faith in his blood (Rom 3: 24-25). Justified people are declared **innocent** in the courtroom where God is judge; justified people are **redeemed** – the blood of Christ has paid their debt for their sin; and justified people receive the **righteousness of God** – they are now seen as righteous and just by God, no matter how they see themselves.

As it says in Rom 3:26, God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who believes in His Son. The atonement of Jesus justifies us. When Jesus “makes amends” for us, we are no longer guilty but innocent; no longer slaves to sin, but redeemed; no longer stained by our sin, but righteous and clean.

When Jesus makes your amends to God, this is what happens. But there is much more. Romans 3 talks about God’s justice and how he is just, as he offered his Son in our place. Tonight, from Romans 5, I want us to see that the atoning sacrifice is also about God’s love. Jesus’ sacrifice, and our faith in that

sacrifice, also means that we have peace with God. It means we are reconciled to God.

The big word in Romans 3 was “propitiation.” But another way to understand atonement is this: “At-One-Ment.” We can be at one with God, through Christ. There is a lot of good news in Romans 5, more than we can cover tonight, but I want us to get an idea of the joy of being reconciled to God. The Gospel principle as I see it in step 9 is that **Christ’s death gives us a reconciled life**. So here we go:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup>but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

A reconciled life means peace with God.

Paul says that, “since we have been justified **by faith**, we have peace with God.” Way back in step 1, we talked about how victory in Christ starts with surrender to Christ. In faith we walk out of the enemy camp and into the camp of the risen, victorious King. We’re no longer at war; we’re no longer enemies. Peace

comes when we surrender. God is not your enemy, and God no longer considers you his enemy.

Now the Christian is still at war, but as Paul says in Romans 7, we are war with the members of our flesh. We are war with our sin nature. But we have peace with God because of the atoning sacrifice of His Son. Even being at war with our sin nature is good news, because before we trusted Christ, we were slaves to our sin nature, unable to wage war.

But being reconciled means you have peace with God, no matter how many battles you feel you are losing.

A reconciled life means access into His grace (v.2)

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus means that we now have access into God's grace. The picture here is of Jesus as the Great High Priest in the temple of God. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice – he is the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” as John says in his gospel. So he is the sacrifice, **and** he is the one offering the sacrifice to God. The writer of Hebrews calls him the Great High Priest, always interceding with God the Father, so that we may “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

So being reconciled means you may at any time approach the throne of grace, with confidence.

A reconciled life means hope in the glory of God (v.3, 5).

This is a future hope. Paul is saying that all those who are in Christ can look forward with hope to a time when God's glory will be revealed and all will be made right with the world. The future hope of the Christian is that we will be

glorified with Him – we will be given resurrection bodies, not these broken-down things we live in now. We will no longer be at war with sin, because sin will no longer exist. We will no longer have to make amends, because we will not do or say anything that will require an amends to be made. Your life will be as God always intended it to be – a life of love, worship, deep relationships and joy. Paul says we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” No matter what is happening to you at this instant, this is the sure hope of every believer.

A reconciled life means hope in our present circumstances (v.3, 4).

It is our future hope, our hope in the glory of God that drives our present hope. One day all things will be put right. All evil will be eradicated. And we wait for that day. But our hope doesn't have to be only in the future. Reconciled believers get a taste of future glory in our present circumstances.

So we aren't crazy to want Jesus to return soon. In the meantime, Paul says, “Our hope does not put us to shame,” because “God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (v.5).” We get to taste of little of what heaven will be like. We will one day be in the presence of God 24/7, but now, we have been given the Holy Spirit. Paul says elsewhere that the Holy Spirit is a “deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.” It is literally God working in us to “will and act according to his good pleasure.”

We experience a sense of peace – sometimes it is an unmistakable calm in the middle of a huge storm in our life and we know it is God in us and with us.

We experience a love for God that we never had before. We are grateful; overwhelmed at times with appreciation for all that He has done for us.

Verse 5 says, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts.” This can be read, “our love for God,” and it can be read as “the love of God for us.” Both ways work, and both are a work of the Spirit in us. Verse 8: “God shows **his love** for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This love, this love that cost God his Son, has been poured into our hearts.

All of this happens when we are reconciled to God through the atonement, the amends of Christ on our behalf. And our response, therefore, is to rejoice. We rejoice not only in the future hope of the glory of God that will be ours. We rejoice in our sufferings. We can rejoice in our sufferings because we have peace with God, and so we know that He is using our sufferings to produce perseverance (or patience), and as we grow in perseverance and patience our character grows, and we become more and more like him in who we hope.

No one enjoys suffering – I doubt that Paul enjoyed suffering, and he endured a lot of it. But when we are reconciled to God, knowing that we have been reconciled only because He loved us enough to die for us, we see suffering in a whole new light.

Of course, recovery includes embracing suffering. It is putting up with some present pain to develop some patience and perseverance. And as we hang in there, persevering, we see our character change – we experience more victory; we experience community; we experience deeper relationships; and we experience, in a very real way, God at work in us. So when we get to step 9, we find that we are able to offer amends, something we never dreamed we would do when we entered this program.

We believe this fact that hurt people hurt people. But I want us to believe this truth as well – **reconciled people reconcile**. In other words, we who have been reconciled to God through the blood of Christ, who now have peace with God, perseverance, character and hope, we can indeed offer reconciliation to others.

Much more shall we be saved from his wrath (v.9)

Notice how Paul uses the phrase “much more.” Verse 9: “Since therefore, we have been justified by his blood, **much more** shall we be saved by him from God’s wrath.” Judgment day is coming, and God’s wrath will be poured out on all his enemies. But never forget that you are not an object of God’s wrath if you are in Christ. What’s poured out on you is God’s love (v.5).

Christians do not experience God’s wrath, even now. They experience God’s discipline, as a father disciplines the child he loves. Continue to rebel, and expect to feel consequences. Your heavenly Father disciplines those He loves.

Christians also experience life in a fallen world. So broken relationships cause pain, and may or may not be reconcilable. But God even uses this undeserved pain to develop your patience, character and hope. You are not an object of God’s wrath. You were an enemy, but you have been reconciled.

And he used the “much more” argument again in v.10: “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, **much more**, having been reconciled, shall we saved by his life.” Paul’s argument is that the hard work has been done – the rest of this salvation plan is the easy part. Now we understand that nothing is “hard” or “easy” for God, but if something were to be hard, it would be the sacrifice of His son, a tearing apart of the Trinity for a time. It

had to be hard, in a way, for God to pour out His wrath for all mankind's sin throughout all history onto the Son he loved, and who lived a perfect life as Jesus the man.

It had to happen to demonstrate his justice and love, but now that it is done, the easy part, as it were, is to continue to form us in His image, by the power of His Spirit working in us in the middle of our sufferings. We were enemies, sinners, without hope and God took care of that through the death of his son. Now the life of His son continues to save us for His good purposes – the team is back together again – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son even now is interceding on our behalf before the throne of grace, and the Spirit of the Son is alive in us. We are being saved, as we speak, by Jesus' life in heaven, and by His life in us on earth. It's the easy part; it's the joyful part, and so, as Paul says, we rejoice because we have received this amazing gift of reconciliation.

So we are saved to live the life that Christ intends for us. For those of us working this program, the life we live includes reconciliation. Again, **reconciled people reconcile.**

Paul talks about the hard part and easy part of reconciliation from God's perspective, so let's talk about the hard part and easy part of offering amends.

I think the hard part is to see your sin clearly for what it is. You have seen all the debris on your side of the street. You can't clean your side until you see it, and see it clearly as on your side, even as you learn to ignore the debris on the other side. You didn't see your sin when you started recovery – you basically only saw others' sin. Your side of the street looked pretty clean to you. So you've done



some really hard work to get this point in your recovery, where you are ready to offer amends.

I also think a hard part to making amends is to receive forgiveness. You may or may not be reconciled to the person you make amends to (although you'll never know until you try). But God, through Christ has forgiven you. It is hard to focus on God's truth – it's much easier to focus on our guilt, our shame and how much everyone is against us.

But as you progress in recovery from sin, you begin to really apply the Gospel to your situation. You get excited when we talk about all that atonement means; about Jesus making your amends to God for you. You have been justified; redeemed; declared innocent. You've been reconciled; you have peace with God; you are no longer weak or dead, but alive in Christ; you are no longer an enemy, but the life of Christ is in you. The more you believe these truths the stronger your recovery gets.

So yes, you can make amends. We've talked about how to do it; do it with a sponsor's help. Think and pray through when the right time will be, trusting that God will make it obvious. But do it, because it will be as freeing a step as you will work in this process.

When you make an amends, you will quite possibly experience great joy, as a lost relationship is reconciled. I know that God rejoices with us when this happens, because He rejoices to see the character of Christ developed in us.

But even if reconciliation with another person never happens, remember the tone of this passage, and that tone is joy. We have peace with God

(v.1); we have been reconciled and will always be reconciled and so we rejoice. We rejoice in the future hope that we will be glorified one day with Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth. We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that in Christ, God is using everything that happens to us to form His character in us. And we rejoice in God (v.11), in Christ, **because** through him we have received reconciliation. Soak in this joy, and let it be the fuel for making amends.