



Reconciled by Jesus

When I was about 10 years old my brother, sister, and I would go swimming with our friends and their mother. There was a place to swim at a lake nearby, and my friend's grandmother had a house on the shore of the lake.

My friends had grown up swimming there, but I was much slower learning to swim than they had been. I remember one time I wanted to prove that I could swim pretty well, so I dove down to the bottom. I had tried to do it lots of times before, but I had never made it to the bottom. This time I succeeded. But two or three times as I swam for the surface, I thought I was above water, and I opened my mouth but there was no air, just water.

I didn't panic. I kept my head. But, it seemed like hours, even though it was only a matter of seconds. Finally, I made it to the top and I could breathe again. It was so wonderful to be able to breathe air, once again, and feel fully alive. I didn't panic, but I did cough quite a bit, and I took a break on the shore for about ten minutes, and then I dove back into the water.

Spiritually, we are in over our heads. Sometimes we dive deep into things that separate us from God. Like the air we need to breathe, we need to get close to God, to really be alive. He is the source of life. He is the one who gave us the gift of life. He alone can provide the life we truly need. Not only can He provide life now, but He can provide life for all eternity.

We may feel like a young boy, thrashing up through the depths of the water, straining to get to the surface where we can breathe. We seem to be getting closer, but each time we try to breathe there is no air, just more water. God has provided a way for us to receive the life He has for us, but it isn't by our own efforts. It is as if Jesus lifts us out of the water's depths, and brings us to where we can receive the breath of life He provides for us.

There are many things in this world that separate us from God. God has a plan to provide the means of reconciliation so that we can be at peace with Him. That way is through Christ. Once we are established in the peace Christ mom, there are additional effects of that peace that will spread into other parts of our life. We will be much more at peace with other Christians. And, at the end of time, when Jesus returns, we will be at peace with all of creation in the new heaven and the new earth.

In this study we will consider how Jesus as Savior and Messiah has created ...

- Reconciliation with God,
- Reconciliation with Those in Christ, and
- Reconciliation with All Creation.

Reconciliation with God

All of humanity is separated from God. Everyone is guilty of sin (Romans 3:23). Whether we realize it or not, we are, by nature, all enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Like the air we breathe, we need God, but we can do nothing to bring ourselves closer to God. That is why we need a Savior.

The Hebrew language has no word for “reconciliation,” yet Paul uses the Greek word for “reconciliation” quite a lot. So, if the word doesn’t appear in the Old Testament, we might wonder why Paul sees reconciliation as one of the central teachings of Christ’s ministry. It’s because Isaiah tells about the restoration of the nation of Israel, after the Messiah comes. Paul saw Jesus’ ministry as the Messiah, as reconciling God to His people, and the result is the restoration that Isaiah predicted. Just think of Paul encountering Jesus on the Road to Damascus. Paul realizes that Jesus is the Messiah, and then in his mind he begins putting the pieces of the Old Testament teaching together.

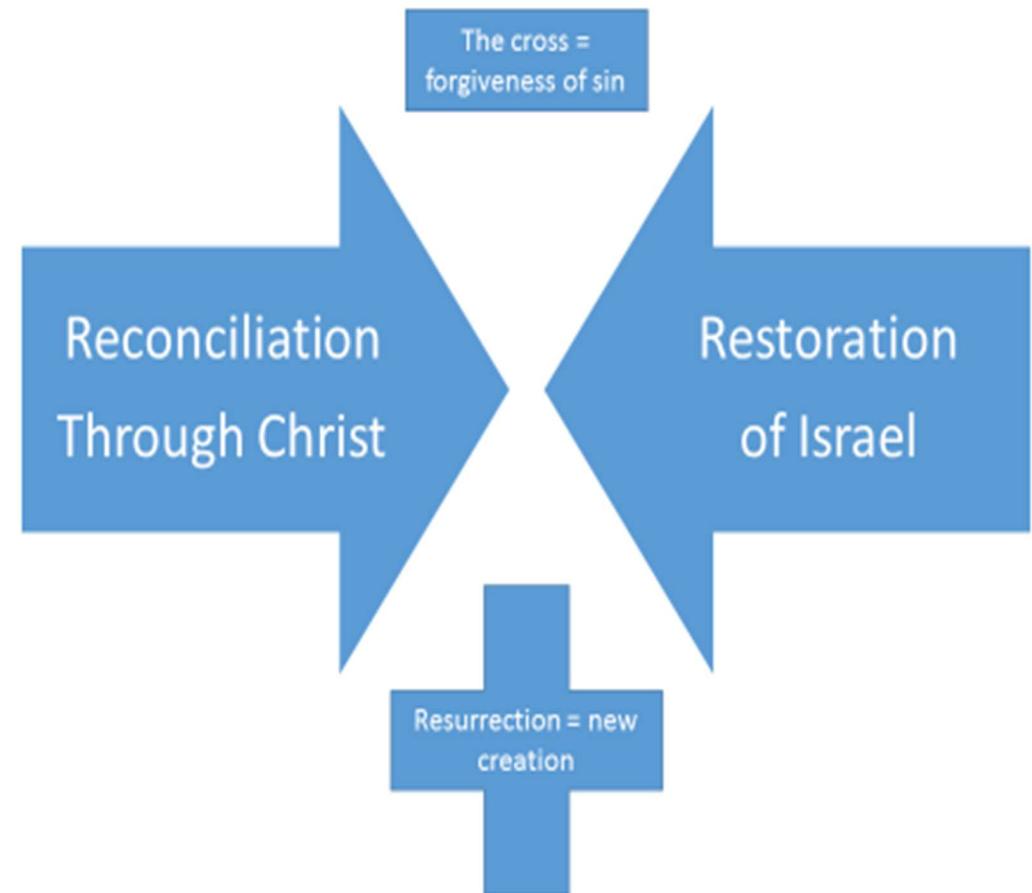
Isaiah promised the restoration of the relationship between God and His people in Isaiah 43:18-19.

Isaiah 43:18–19 (ESV)
18 “Remember not the former things,
 nor consider the things of old.
19 Behold, I am doing a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.

Paul must have grown up hearing about God’s promise concerning the future restoration of Israel, as did all Jewish children. Little children would ask their parents, “When is this ‘new thing’ going to happen?” Parents would tell them, “When the Messiah comes.” When Paul heard the Messiah call his name all the pieces came together, like pieces of a puzzle.

The promise of the new creation that Isaiah prophesied about would surpass the golden age of King Solomon. The desert land would flourish with rivers of water.

On the road to Damascus Christ revealed to Paul that these prophecies were connected to what He had done. Paul tells us, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, that Christ has inaugurated a new creation.



2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Everyone who is in Christ has become a part of this new creation.

Paul says a lot about reconciliation by Christ's sacrifice (2 Corinthians 5:15 – "Christ died for all"). Through Christ's death on the cross, an atonement for sin was provided so that "the old has passed away" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through Jesus resurrection the power to create life provided a way for "the new" to come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). "For their sake" Jesus "was raised" from the dead (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Negatively, Jesus' death on the cross paid the price of sin, taking away the "old" debt of sin (see the minus sign in the diagram). Like a math problem, it was subtracted from the equation of what separated believers from God.

Positively, Jesus' resurrection began the new creation Isaiah had foretold (see the "plus" sign). He added eternal life to the equation. His power of the resurrection makes believers able to live in fellowship with God.

Isaiah had prophesied that a time would come when Israel would be restored and have a good relationship with God. Isaiah didn't say much about how God would cause that restoration to take place. Paul understood that the restoration Isaiah prophesied had come through Jesus' reconciliation.

Without Christ there would be no hope for reconciliation with God. Like my experience of diving too deep, we might try to come up for air, only to find we are still under water and not able to take a breath. Jesus died on the cross and rose again, and prepared the way for a new creation. He includes those who believe in Him as part of the new creation. The transformation of believers begins by giving them a new heart that can be molded and shaped, so that they begin to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in their actions and thoughts. But that's just the beginning of the reconciliation Jesus Christ has accomplished.

Reconciliation with Those in Christ

The church has been called one of the greatest scandals of the Christian faith because Christians have disagreed with each other so often and so greatly. In connection to reconciliation, Paul, and others in the New Testament, teach that Christians should be reconciled to each other. If you have ever been a part of a church fellowship for any length of time, you know that disagreements between brothers and sisters in Christ, are common. There is a difference between what the scripture promises and what most Christians experience.

Let's take a look at one passage where Paul builds on the idea of the restoration promised by Isaiah, and applies it to Christians. What should we expect of Christian fellowship? What does the Bible say?

Ephesians 2:11–22 (ESV)

¹¹Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— ¹²remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Paul teaches that because Christ has made everyone who believes in Him into one people, that all who believe in Him are united by Him (Ephesians 2:14&15). Be careful how you interpret this. Paul is not saying that Christians will always get along with each other and never have disagreements. In fact, if you look at the book of Acts, you will see that Paul experienced lots of disagreements with other Christians. What Paul is saying is that the heart of the believer has become like the heart of Christ. We are like Jesus spiritually, deep inside. Our motivations have been transformed. However, Paul is not saying that this means that all Christians will get along perfectly.

Paul is giving a reason for Christians to set aside their differences. It is a description of how believers are being transformed so that they are becoming more and more like Jesus. But it is also a prescription. Believers need to recognize that they have a new identity in Jesus Christ. All Christians will have differences with one another. There are different races. Different social backgrounds. Different personal experiences. All of these things shape who they are. But what is most important is that they are in Jesus Christ. And He is making them so that they reflect His image. The reasons for unity among Christians outweigh the reasons for division.

Paul's teaching here is a prescription for what could be more than it is a description of what is. Christians need to ask themselves if they have done everything possible to find unity with other Christians, before acting on their disagreement with other Christians. Ask yourself, "Did Jesus die on the cross so that I could act hatefully toward my brother in Christ?" Do you think that Jesus should have been made to suffer a little more on the cross, and only then would you find His suffering sufficient to take away your anger at your fellow Christian? Take a moment to pray to Jesus and tell Him how you feel about your brother or sister in Christ, and why you are struggling to act in a loving way toward him or her. I believe that if you sincerely pour out your heart to Jesus in prayer, He will help you to weather the difficulty, and to find love in your heart for your brother or sister in Christ.

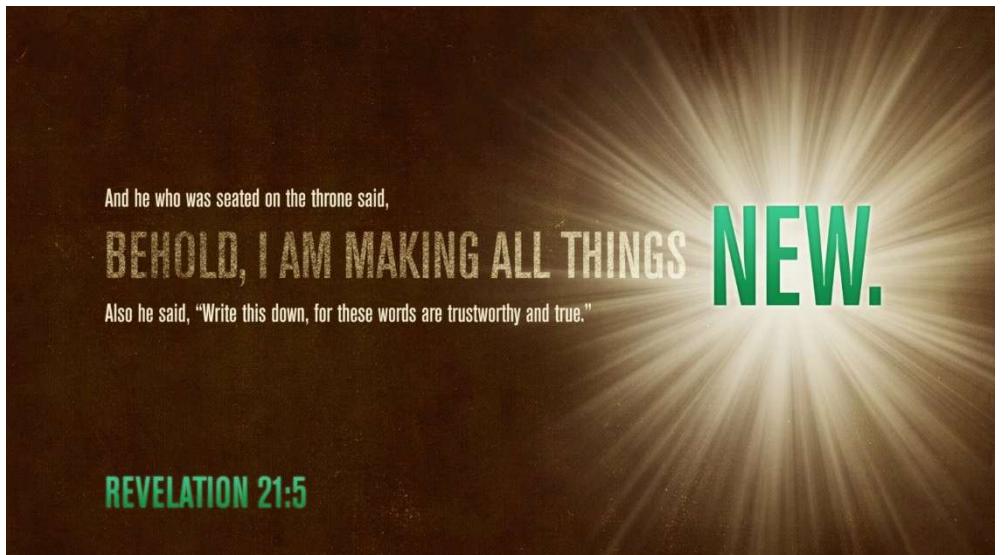
In extreme situations the only solution may be to spend time apart. You may have to love your brother or sister in Christ from a distance. Paul did that himself, separating from John-Mark over a disagreement (Acts 15:37-40), and later reunited with his brother in Christ (Colossians 4:10). It's not ideal, but it may be the best solution for the moment. We should always leave an open door so that reconciliation can come later.

The bottom line is that Jesus died on the cross so that there will be reconciliation between all those who are in Christ. So, if you can't work it out now, Jesus will make sure that you work it out in the new heaven and earth. It would be best if you can work out your disagreements now, but we have all of eternity before us. There will be time enough to work out every disagreement between those who are in Christ.

Reconciliation with All Creation

Christ reconciled all who are in Him with God the Father. He is in the process of reconciling all who believe in Him with one another. But, the biggest moment of reconciliation will come when Jesus returns, and everyone who is in Christ will be reconciled to everything in the new heaven and new earth.

Paul focused on what has already been accomplished by Christ: reconciliation between believers and God. But in the book of Revelation, the Apostle John, focused on what will only be accomplished when Jesus returns. Paul talks about believers seeing the face of Jesus in their hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6). But John talks about the time when believers will see the face of Jesus, eye to eye (Revelation 22:4; 1 John 3:2).



When Jesus returns a new heaven, and a new earth will become a full and final reality. The old creation will be gone. The return from exile Isaiah described will come.

Paul understood that believers are made new spiritually. They have a new heart and a new way of living. But John saw that Christians will suffer persecution and rejection until Jesus Christ returns. Only when Jesus returns will Christians be fully at peace, totally reconciled, totally restored in every way. And, everything in all creation, in the new heavens and new earth, will be totally reconciled to those who are in Christ.

Conclusion – Hold on to Jesus

As those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, hold on to your faith in Him. There will be joyous experiences when we see His hand at work in our lives. We should rejoice and give thanks.

Remember, Jesus Christ has paid the price of your sin, so you can be reconciled to God. Like a diver returning to the surface of the water, you can breathe deeply a breath of fresh air. God, Your Creator, will sustain you and provide for you because Christ has saved you.

Remember that even though you may struggle from time to time to get along with your brothers and sisters in Christ that it will not always be this way. When you can experience deep fellowship and unity with other Christians, rejoice and praise God for the glimpse of what is coming. The day will come when we will truly be one body in Christ, without any division.

Remember when you stub your toe, or bang your elbow against a concrete wall, that the day is coming when physical creation will never do harm to us at all. God will make all things new, and there will be no more tears.

An eternal, and glorious future awaits those in Christ. We have a taste of it already through the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and moments of great Christian fellowship. Hold on to Jesus. He's holding on to you.

Christ Brings Us Back to God (2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2)

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commanding ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 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 creation. 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. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. ([ESV](#))

B	E	M	C	N	L	G	E	F	L	N	C	E
O	F	H	D	A	O	N	M	S	T	O	V	D
A	L	F	L	P	N	I	I	T	M	I	R	F
S	E	N	O	P	G	W	T	M	L	T	N	D
T	S	D	H	E	E	O	E	A	I	A	E	T
I	H	F	E	A	R	N	E	G	V	I	L	N
C	O	E	B	L	D	K	K	A	D	L	B	T
H	P	O	R	I	I	G	A	I	E	I	A	O
D	E	C	N	E	I	C	S	N	O	C	R	S
M	R	G	H	V	F	O	N	O	M	N	O	L
C	P	A	I	R	D	O	F	O	W	O	V	A
F	V	N	G	N	I	D	R	O	C	C	A	V
O	G	B	T	E	K	S	N	E	D	E	F	D
T	C	R	A	A	R	K	T	C	A	R	R	A