

# The Reconciling Power of the Cross

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**Bible Text:** Colossians 1:19-22; Ephesians 2:11-16

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians 1. We're going to be looking at a few verses in Colossians 1 and a few verses in Ephesians 2. This is our third topical message on discipleship. If you haven't yet gotten the book, we're giving a book to all the families in the church so if you're visiting here you're welcome to take one and join us in the study of the book "Discipling," by Mark Dever. It's a book that we as elders felt like the church would benefit from reading together and it's talking about our need for one another and the need to be a disciple is to be a follower of Jesus Christ and to disciple someone else is to say to them, "Follow me as I follow Christ." So really the call of the Christian is we are all to be disciples and disciple makers. We are all to help one another follow Jesus. So that's what this book is about and so we're talking about that on Sunday mornings for a number of weeks. We're looking at the subject of discipleship and really in the big picture in Scripture of our need for relationships and how God calls us to himself and he calls us to himself in the context. When we come to Christ, you don't just become an individual follower of Jesus, you join a community of people who are following Jesus and God is about doing that. The community that he's building is at the heart and center of what he's doing in the universe. Jesus said, "I will build my church." The church is the assembly, it's an assembly of called-out people. That's what he's building. He's not just building individuals that are separate and distinct as parallel lines running through eternity. No, he's building a community of people who, yes, come to faith in a very real sense, you must individually repent and believe but once you repent and believe and you are given new life, you are now brothers and sisters with every other person who names the name of Jesus Christ in truth.

So we are learning what that means and looking at that and two weeks ago we started this series talking about the high calling of God in discipling, in discipleship, in creating man. We looked at Genesis 1 and 2 at how God has called us to work together, to delight. When he created man, he intended man, male and female, and then all of their children to work together, to delight in one another together, to worship together. It was all a picture and it was to be the image and likeness of God because God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, works together, delights in one another continually. There is nothing that the Father does independent of the Son and the Spirit, nothing that the Spirit does independent of the Son and the Father, nothing that the Son does independent of the Spirit and the Father. They work together. They delight in one another and we are called to reflect their glory. What a high calling. What an amazing calling. So we talked about

that in Genesis 1 and 2. We see the image and likeness of God and we are created distinct people in the same way that the Trinity is three persons yet in one essence. They are one though they are distinct persons. He creates distinct persons who now become part of one body, the church.

We talked last week about man's fundamental problem, sin; that the thing that hinders us from being together is sin. Sin, what it is, it's to doubt God's word, to deny God's word, to deny his goodness, to deny his authority and to live independently of him. And what does it do? We saw it brings separation. Sin separates. It divides. We are supposed to be together worshiping but sin separates us from God vertically and it separates us from one another, and we saw this last week in Genesis 3. It's real clear how sin has that twofold dividing power vertically and horizontally. And the breach between man and God is infinite. It cannot be overcome through human effort. It must be overcome through God's mighty power. And the breach between man and man is also impossible to bridge. It's not something small, it's something that can only be bridged by the power of the living God changing our hearts and removing the dominating power of sin to divide us.

We saw that the cross is the hope and we saw that even in Genesis 3, the wonderful promise of the Gospel there in the curse that God pronounces on the serpent. "He will bruise your head, you will bruise his heel," looking ahead to Christ. So the cross is the one thing that bridges the chasm caused by sin. It bridges the chasm caused by sin that separates us from God and it bridges the chasm caused by sin which separates us from one another. It's the cross. And I have chosen the two passages that I have that you're going to see Colossians 1, the verses we're going to read, and Ephesians 2. I want you to when we read them, pay very close attention. You're going to see the same vocabulary is used in both passages. You're going to hear words like "reconcile, reconciliation." You're going to hear the words "excluded from, alienated, enmity, hatred." And you're going to see that what's interesting is it's talking about how, we're going to see in Colossians 1 is going to say that we were formerly alienated from God, we hated God, we didn't want anything to do with God, but the cross reconciled us to God. Ephesians 2 is going to use the same verbiage but it's talking about the horizontal relationship. It's going to say that the Jew and Gentile, the horizontal relationships between the Jew and Gentile which is really an argument from the greater to the lesser, if God can reconcile Jew and Gentile, he can reconcile anybody with any problem. But he uses the same language to talk about the vertical in Colossians 1, he talks about the horizontal in chapter 2. He says things like, "You were excluded, you were alienated, you were at enmity, hating one another and how did God make peace? Through the cross," so that the cross is the answer.

So the title of the message is "The Reconciling Power of the Cross." The reconciling power of the cross. We'll read verses 19 to 23 of Colossians 1 and then we'll turn a few pages over and read Ephesians right after that, Ephesians 2:11-16. So our text, Colossians 1:19-22 and Ephesians 2:11-16, the reconciling power of the cross. Now, let's see how the cross reconciles us in the vertical relationship to God. Colossians 1:19,

19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made

peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

The reconciling power of the cross that takes someone who hated God, was alienated from God, engaged in evil deeds, running away from God, and now reconciled.

Turn back over, right before Colossians is Philippians, right before Philippians is Ephesians. So Ephesians 2:11-16. Paul says that the cross is also the remedy for our relationship problems horizontally. It's the cross. In verse 11 he says,

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands-- 12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down [the dividing wall of hostility or] the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Now what I want us to see is there are two main points and then we're going to spend some time on the application of these two points. It's kind of like three points, the third point is application. The first two points, though, we want to look at and the first point is the cross reconciles us to God. The cross reconciles us to God. We see this in the Colossians passage so turn back over to Colossians now. We are going to spend some time there and then we'll come back to Ephesians.

So Colossians 1, the cross reconciles us to God. We said that since separates, sin divides, sin alienates, and the cross reconciles. This is God's remedy and I want to consider this under basically three subpoints, our two main points and the first main point, remember, is the cross reconciles us to God. That's our first main point. It has three subpoints: before, after and how. Before after and how because this is what you have unfolding. He basically says, "Look what it was like before you encountered Christ and his cross. Look what it was like before that." And then he tells you, "Look what it's like now or after, and then how did it get this way? How did this change happen?"

Okay, first of all, before. Some keywords in the passage there in verse 21, "although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds." You were formerly, this is where you were. He says, "Colossian Christians, you who now love Jesus Christ,

you who now have been washed in his blood, think about this, not too long ago you were alienated." And this word "alienated" is one of the strongest words in the New Testament. It's an intensified form of a word which means alienate. It means "to be estranged entirely; to be alienated completely." It's basically the word "alienate" with an intense and fine preposition on the front of it which means "away from." So it's like to be alienated away from is kind of the force of it. The word occurs three times in the Bible: once here in our passage; once in Ephesians 2:12; and once in Ephesians 4:18. Paul is using this word to picture how estranged we were from God. Ted mentioned earlier the Bible teaches we are dead and it teaches that in Ephesians 2. We are dead in trespasses and sins. People don't come into this world loving God, they come into this world hating God.

Now, there is a paradox about that. Let's be clear about this. It often is confusing because when you look at the world, people are by and large religious people. Throughout history, on average, I heard this not too long ago, most surveys no matter when you take them, where you take them, 10% of the people are atheists, 90% believe in God in some form. The problem is they don't believe in the right God and so they are religious, they are zealous for spiritual things, they love their God, they love the God they have made in their own minds. You hear people say sometimes, "My God wouldn't do that. My God would not cause the deaths of all those animal sacrifices. My God would not handle Sodom and Gomorrah the way Bible's God did, pouring out fire and brimstone upon them. My God wouldn't." Well, you could say, "You know, I believe you're 100% accurate in your statement. Your God would not do that because your God is a figment of your own imagination."

And we all were idolaters before. We used to want to make God in our own image. That's the problem what sin does. Paul makes this clear in Romans 1 where he says, "Though they know God, they see evidence of God, we all see evidence of God in creation, his invisible power, his eternal power, his invisible attributes are clearly seen through what is made. Yet it's our nature not to give thanks and not to worship him, not to worship the true God." So people may like the idea of God, they just don't like the idea of the true and living God. Sin has given us an aversion to him.

So we come into this world opposed to him. We come into this world as it says here, "hostile in mind." The idea of "hostility" here is "hatred." It means to be malicious. It means to be opposing, actively opposing. In fact, the phrase "hostile in mind" here is really emphatic. The word used for "mind" is an unusual word, the Greek word that is not used often in the New Testament, and it pictures, it's the word for "mind," but it's intensified and it means an active mind. So the idea is the mind is at work, the mind is at work, the mind is at work, and what is the mind at work doing? Hating God even though the sinner doesn't realize he hates God fully. That's the darkness of sin.

And you can see this, you know, people will talk about God and until you see the hatred come out when it's the God of the Bible making some claims. The God of the Bible says, "I have created every single person on the face of the earth and I own every single person on the face of the earth. You belong to me and I have a claim on you and I will judge you." When you say things like that, it begins to press home and you begin to see the

opposition. And when you see hatred come out, things like when it somewhat explains the intensity in some of the protests like pro-abortion protests. Why is there such hatred and antipathy in the hearts of these people protesting for the right to kill their unborn babies? Why is it? They could just protest, I mean, it's fine to protest, it's part of our society, right? You vote, you can make your views known, but why the hatred and the antipathy? Why isn't it just a disagreement? "I disagree with you pro-life people." Why is it that they hate us or that it comes out at times when you really press it? Because when they hear us saying things like, "Listen, God has created every life and it is his prerogative to kill, it's not ours. He says, 'Thou shall not kill.'" You're pressing in, the living God is pressing in upon them and their hatred to God comes out. And listen, there but for the grace of God go we. And the fact is that as Christians, even born-again believers, there are times when we see sin rising up in us, don't we? When someone presses on my life in a certain area and I don't want to deal with that, the ugliness of sin comes up. That's why we have to kill it on a daily basis through the cross. So there is no room for pride upon our parts but we, at the same time, lovingly speak the truth so that they might come to understand they need to be reconciled to God. That's the first step in getting reconciled to God.

So alienated, hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, doing damaging things, attacking God, as it were, with their life saying, "I will not." You know, you hear this come out. Somebody said not too long ago, "I will not, nobody is going to tell me what to do." Well, that's somewhat the American spirit, isn't it, actually? And that's part of maybe the weakness of the American enterprise. I love America. I get all choked up when Lee Greenwood sings his song. I really do. It's amazing. God has blessed this country and our country basically, our political system is what it is because it takes the best, it basically applies the Scripture. The reason checks and balances are there is because even though it was an amalgamation of people, deists and Christians and all kinds, I'm not saying America was ever a Christian nation, please understand. But I sometimes overstate that point to the point of making you think I don't think it's somewhat an evidence of God's common grace, and it is because the checks and balances in the American government are a picture of the fact that there were people understanding the reality of sin. Absolute power corrupts absolutely and so you need these checks and balances and that's one of the things that made this country a success. Now, it still doesn't make it God's country and God's people. God's nation is his church and therefore we can rejoice that we are born in America but if America falls, the kingdom of God keeps marching on and that's where our true allegiance is, right?

Now, having said that then, this idea of being excluded from fellowship with God, alienated from God, it's overcome. That's where we were. That's before you encounter the cross. Now come to the second subpoint: after. We are still talking about the cross reconciles us to God. We talked about before, now after. Look at the words he uses, "you were alienated," verse 22, "yet now He has reconciled you." You were formerly, you were separated from fellowship, you were estranged, alienated entirely, you were a nonparticipant but now you are reconciled. This word "reconciled" in the same way the word "alienated" is a strong word, an intensified word, this is again a relatively rare word in the New Testament. The word "reconciled" occurs a lot. We translate a number of

words "reconciled," but this particular word only occurs three times and here it is twice and the other time is in Ephesians 2:16, and it's basically an intensified form of the word "reconciliation," a stronger form. It means "to be reconciled entirely." And to be reconciled means to have a change happen in the relationship and to now set up a relationship where there had not been one before. You were strangers, you were separated from God, you were hating God but now he has reconciled you. He has brought you not just in the door in the outer court, he has brought you into the very throne room, into the family room, as it were. You have been completely brought into the heart of God.

This is God's purpose, to reconcile all things, we see in verse 20, "to reconcile all things to Himself"; to bring all things in heaven and on earth other than the unbelieving people and rebellious demons, everything, all of creation would be reconciled to God. He reconciled you. He has brought you back into peace. He made peace. There is no longer conflict, there is peace. So many passages talk about this. Romans 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God." We were at war with God but now we are at peace with God.

Now, this passage actually speaks of only our, the reconciliation that Paul when he's talking to the Colossians, he's talking about one half of reconciliation. He's saying, "Look at how you used to be opposed to God, how you used to be alienated from God," but he doesn't even bring out the other part in this passage that the Bible clearly teaches is that not only were we at war with God but God was at war with us. That's something the Bible clearly teaches, that we were under the wrath of God. That word occurs over 180 times in the Bible. It's not something you cannot, we might rather avoid it, we shouldn't. Whenever we want to avoid something the Bible teaches it just shows we've got a problem in our own hearts, right? And there are times where I find myself wrestling with something in the Scripture but what we want to do is see what the Bible says and if we stay there we come to see, yes, it's good and it's right. One of the attributes of God in the Scriptures is not just that he's a God of love, not just that he's a God of goodness, but he's also a God of holiness and justice and wrath. And wrath is his anger with evil. It's his settled determination to bring evil to an end, to judge it.

Now, just think about that for a moment. It's unsettling to us because we know we deserve his wrath but isn't wrath a good thing? What would it be like to live in a world where people did evil and they never were tracked down by the authorities, they were never punished? What if you lived in a world where there was no police force to stop mass murderers from continuing to murder? Serial child molesters from continuing to molest children? What kind of world would it be? There is something in our hearts that cries out for justice in those things because we are made in the image of God and if we feel that way about the sin that we see that goes unpunished, how much must a holy God long to punish evil and isn't it good and right that he does?

Now, that's good and right but it does create a problem for us, doesn't it? Because we realize, the Bible teaches that we are under the wrath of God. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." God's love, his offer of grace, he gives his Son, 20

verses later in that passage we read that, "the one who believes in the Son has life, the one who does not obey the Son," speaking of Jesus, "the one who does not obey the Son does not have life but the wrath of God abides on him." It's a New Testament doctrine as well as an Old. The wrath of God. John the Baptist came preaching, "The wrath of God is coming. Repent! The day of the Lord is at hand." The day of the Lord is the day of God's wrath, the day of God's judgment, the day he comes to punish evil.

So we were at war with God, we were warring against him and he was determined to punish us and it was a hopeless predicament. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love of which he loved us even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins, he made us alive together with Christ. He sent Jesus to stand in the way of the wrath of God and that's what happened on the cross. The cross, he takes the wrath of God out of the way by receiving in his own flesh the due punishment for our sin. Every sin that had ever been committed by everyone who would ever believe, every sin of thought, every sin of action past, present and future, and all of the just punishment for each one of those transactions, the whole measure of punishment that every sin that you will ever commit, that you ever have committed, all of those added up and then upon everyone else who would ever believe, that is what was put on Jesus at the cross. That's why he said, "It is finished," at the end. Before he died, "It is finished. Paid in full," is what that could be translated, "Paid in full." "It is finished," in Aramaic was stamped on legal documents, financial documents to say the debt is settled. So he says, "It is finished."

So he has taken the wrath of God. God no longer is angry with you if you're in Christ. He cannot have any anger, the anger has been fully satisfied. The justice has been fully meted out therefore there is no antipathy from God to you, I mentioned Romans 5:2, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ because we have been justified by faith, the next verse says we stand in grace. What is God's attitude toward the believer? It is grace, favor. He looks at you the way he looks at his Son. He delights in you and me, though we are still sinners, because of the blood of Christ which stands over us, removing his wrath and brings the affection of the loving Father that he has toward his Son to each of his children. This is why John says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the sons of God." What an amazing reality.

Now, that's reconciled to God on his part and now what happens then is he takes out the heart of stone, the heart of wickedness, and he causes us to be born again so that we repent and believe. We have a new heart now to love God. Now, we still have a sin nature but in our essential being there is a fundamental change, a transformation, and now so we love God. We suddenly find ourselves agreeing, "Yes, your word is right. Yes, it is good that you are the way you are. Yes, your Son is glorious." And we marvel at his love and we bask in his love and we love him because he first loved us. So there is reconciliation. Where did that reconciliation happen? At the cross.

Now, Ephesians 2, Paul is saying the same thing happened horizontally at the cross, and when a person becomes a believer, they are immediately granted the power to be right with every other believer, no matter what's happened. And this is what he is saying in Ephesians 2, he says, "Listen, you used to be alienated." In fact the word in verse 12,

"remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel," the word "excluded" is that strong word I mentioned that occurs three times in the New Testament, once in our passage in Colossians, "You were alienated," here it is translated "excluded" in the NASB, "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel." So not only were you alienated from God but you were alienated from the people of Israel. He's talking to those of us who are Gentiles and probably most all of us in this room are Gentiles, that is, we are non-Jewish by birth. A few may be of Jewish descent. Most of us are like Paul is talking to the Ephesians: we were Gentiles, we were the godless, the uncircumcision. I mean, our ancestors were pagans worshiping rocks and stones and living in all manner of ungodliness. That's true of every single one of us. You go back far enough, that's what you find and that's what we would be unless God had sent his Son.

And he says that when he in the cross, he not only brought us back to him but he brought us back to one another. You were excluded, you were strangers but now you have been brought near and he is our peace. He's using the same verbs. In verse 15 he has established peace. In Colossians it was making peace. He is establishing peace and how did he do it? Through the cross. Verse 13, "you were brought near by the blood of Christ." How did the enmity, how did the hostility go away? That's the same word, "enmity" is the same word as "hostility" in Colossians. The same vocabulary here. How did the enmity that you had toward God, now you had enmity toward others, how did it go away? It was abolished in the flesh of Jesus on the cross. It was destroyed. So the cross brings us together. It reconciles us. Here the word "reconcile," verse 16, that he "might reconcile," same word as in Colossians, the word that occurs three times in the Bible. There it is again. He might reconcile completely those who were alienated entirely.

So he's using the most exalted words to describe what has happened to the unbeliever when he comes now from being an enemy of God, hating God, to now being a lover of God in the very family of God. You see, to describe this transformation that has happened, think about the distance that that is, an infinite distance. So he's using words, piling them up to show this incredible distance in Colossians. He takes those same words and says, "This is what happens now horizontally. You didn't realize how distant you were from one another. There has been a chasm between you." And that's true, there are chasms between every unbeliever.

You know, an unbelieving couple who is married for 50 or 60 years, you appreciate just the beauty of following God's design, a man and a woman to live together faithfully for that long. It's a rare thing, isn't it? But even in those situations when there is no knowledge of Christ, what you have is two parallel lines going side-by-side and usually over time, even though they may still be together, you'll see if you get close enough, they're really not that close together because, you see, they are each their own god. They are each living for their own purposes and therefore there can be no communion. The only way that there is cooperation is, "I agree to worship your god a little bit, you worship my god or a little bit but ultimately I'm committed to my way." But what happens when we come to the cross is we lay down our gods and we worship the true and



living God and we find that we are together. This is what the Lord wants us to spend the rest of our lives on earth unpacking and experiencing, that we are now reconciled.

I already covered the second point. I don't think I called it out properly so this is, the cross reconciles us to one another. Did I say that? Okay. Before, now and how, the same way. Before we were alienated, now we are reconciled, how? In his flesh, in his blood, through the cross. Now, what does this look like? What does this mean practically? I want to think about that with you and mention three things of how this really reconciles us to one another, what the cross does to reconcile us to one another.

The first thing it does, the cross is the place where I get a right perspective on myself in relation to others. I now see myself correctly. The cross is the one place that you can go to see yourself correctly in relation to others and to see them correctly. It destroys the illusions that we have in our own minds, how we think we are always right, we blame others. When you come to the cross, it puts you in a right frame of mind about yourself and about other people. We're not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought and the place to do that is at the cross. It stops all boasting.

That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1. He says the word of the cross, he's preaching about the word of the cross and then later he says in verse 23, "We preach Christ and Him crucified." Then he says as you read on, he says, "You know, the Lord didn't choose many wise and noble among you, he chose the weak and the base and he brought you to Christ through his doing, not your own, so that no one would boast. Put an end to boasting." So there's no room for glorying in who we are, there is no room in thinking that I can be proud about my upbringing, my background, my race, my socioeconomic level, my education. You can't be proud about any of those things yourself, not when you come to realize it is all nothing. And the cross tells you it's nothing because the cross, when you go to the cross it tells you that no matter how high of a view I'm holding of myself right now, maybe as a Christian you're growing, you're getting to have better theology and you see other people around you that are messed up in their theology and you begin thinking more highly of yourself than you ought, when you go to the cross, it reminds you that this is how ugly and evil the sin that you committed just now is, that the sins you committed today are this heinous that it required that Jesus suffer that kind of agony.

This is how it brought Jew and Gentile together. The Jews were closer, in a sense spiritually, they were closer to God. They had the covenants. They had the law. They had the temple system. They weren't, except in moments where they really turned away, acting exactly like the nations. Now, they did but in general they were closer. It was the nations around them that were sacrificing their children in the fire. And the Jews thought they were closer but the cross showed them that they were not really closer. The cross showed them that the Jew, the faithful Jew who had tithed all of his life, the faithful Jew that had gone to temple and had always been there for all of the high and holy days, that everything that he had done was nothing when it came to reconciling him to a holy God. He had to come the same way, through the cross. And that despicable Gentile, this is how the Jews thought, that despicable Gentile. They would pray things like, "Thank God that

I'm not a Gentile," and they also pray, "Thank God that I'm not a woman." That shows how messed up they were in their Jewish theology in the first century. "Thank God that I'm not a Gentile and I'm not a woman." That was really messed up theology. I'm sorry I brought the woman thing but that was just part of their messed-up theology, to understand God and the glory he had given to man, male and female, but they also didn't understand their privilege of being priests was not so that they could look down and despise the Gentiles. But they did. But the cross changed that. Peter in Acts 15 when he's talking at the Council of Jerusalem says, "There is no distinction." The Jews were dealing with Gentiles coming to the faith, Jewish believers, and they were wondering, "How can we do this? They've all got to be circumcised." And Peter says, "No. God gave them the Holy Spirit the same way he gave it to us, by faith, for there is no distinction, no difference." That's what Paul is making clear in Romans 3, there is no difference.

So you and I have conflicts with one another, the cross reminds us there is no difference, even the person that has sinned against you in a pretty significant way. Like our story from Matthew 18. I mentioned that the servant who owed 7.5 billion dollars, he had another fellow servant who owed him basically a third of a year's wages, we'll say \$15-16,000. That's a lot of money. Somebody owes you \$15-16,000 and didn't repay you, I think most all of us would be concerned about that. So it wasn't nothing. When the man asked for mercy, though, the servant had no mercy and threw him into prison and then Jesus is teaching that to say this shows the heart of someone who does not understand the magnitude of what they have been forgiven. If you really set someone else's sin on a balance sheet, their sin against me against my sin against Christ, its proper perspective, now I can forgive. If he can forgive me this, then I can forgive you this.

The cross brings us together. It helps us to have a right perspective on ourselves in relation to others and a right perspective on our sin in relation to other people's sin and, thirdly, it helps us to have a right perspective on my need for others and their need for me. What happens is that we go to the cross and we learn to go to the cross and keep ourselves humble and we go to the cross to forgive one another, then we are able to pursue issues that we have with each other. Like when someone sins against you, it's interesting, in fact, I didn't read, we read Matthew 18:21-35, that was the story of the parable of the unmerciful servant, right before that, verses 12 to 20, you have the man who has 100 sheep, loses one, and then you have the verses on church discipline, verses 15 to 20, if your brother sins, go to him, show him his fault, if he repents you have won your brother. If he doesn't repent, take one or two others with you so that the matter will be confirmed. If he doesn't listen to them, tell it to the church. If he doesn't listen to the church, treat him as a pagan or a tax collector. This is how God shepherds his people.

Now, so to be reconciled to each other we have to do both, we have to pursue each other when we are in sin. When another brother is in sin, we have to be willing to go and say, "Listen, I'm concerned about you," and often the best way to do this is to ask questions. "Hey, I'm not sure I'm perceiving this correctly but is this what you said or is this what you did? Help me understand that." But we have to be willing to go. There can be no reconciliation without going. It's not that we as Christians we continue to look at the cross and we say, "It doesn't matter what other people are doing. In relation to the cross,

I'm just going to ignore it. I'm going to overlook it." No, if you love somebody you want to help deliver them from the sin that is binding them up and for there to be reconciliation, there must be true accounting of sin. They have to come to see, "Yes, I sinned in this way. Please forgive me." And without that, there will be no reconciliation. Their darkness is only growing deeper.

So we have to love people enough to go to them, to confront them, but we can do it because we know that, listen, when you go to a brother or sister to confront them about sin, you're basically going to a brother or sister to say, "Let's take a walk to the cross together. I see a concern in your life and maybe I'm seeing it wrong, maybe I'm seeing it right, let's talk about it." And we're supposed to show him his fault, show him his fault means to clearly work through it and say, "This doesn't line up with God's word." And the brother or sister sees that and they may be at first embarrassed, they don't want to talk about it but if we love them and we show them and we say, "Listen, I'm just one beggar talking to another beggar about where to find bread. I'm no better than you but this is standing between us, this is hindering our relationship." How do we do this? How do we deal with us? We both go to the cross. You go to the cross and remember what Jesus has done for you. You take this to the cross, "Lord, look how I have sinned. Look at what I've done. I see it really was wrong of me to be thinking like this or to say the things that I said and to have the attitudes that I had. I was not living in a loving way, honoring and glorifying my Savior. I repent of that and I thank you that the blood of Jesus washes me again." So when we walk to the cross, that person who was wrapped up in a sin that was hindering their walk, their life, and sin doesn't stand still, it is deceitful, it hardens, it kills. We've been looking at that on Wednesday nights studying winning the war within, the battle with sin. And I have quoted over and over on Wednesday nights John Owen's statement, "Kill sin or sin will be killing you." If you don't kill your sin, it will be killing you, Christian. Kill your sin. But we have to help each other kill our sin and if we are not helping each other, it is killing our brothers and sisters.

So we go and we confront in love, in humility, and we are open. We try to get the log out of our own eyes as we go and, "Hey, have I done something? I don't understand. Please tell me what's going on." And it should look like when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, that kind of humility. We should clothe ourselves with humility as we go but yet there is still a willingness to deal with the heart issues. And the reason that you are confident about dealing with the heart issues is because you can take them to the cross. You will find more than you can handle, yes, but there is nothing that the cross can't handle.

And when we have a sense that we love each other and we're all trying to follow Jesus and we're all trying to keep helping each other stay focused on the cross, then what happens is we no longer have to hide anymore. Remember how in Genesis 3, the first thing they did was made loincloths? They hid from each other and remember then they hid from God? They hid from each other because they felt like they needed to hide from God. When you have guilt that is not dealt with in your life, when you have sin that is not dealt with in your life, you're on the run. You are hiding. You feel the need to hide from others because you really feel in your heart and you explain it away and you blame other people and stuff, but the real issue is you're running from God and you are therefore

running from his people, and the most loving thing we can do for each other is to pursue and to go after and to say, "Listen, stop running. Because of Jesus Christ, God is for you. And because of Jesus Christ, I am for you. Let's really deal with this sin issue. Let's talk it through. You show me where I need to repent and I'll show you where you need to repent and let's go to the cross together."

I mean, the reality is when you have a right view and right perspective on yourself because of the cross, one of the things I've learned in ministry through the years is that nothing shocks me in the Christian life, in the Christian world. There are problems that people have that are really big and the fact is we all have problems that are big. So the reality is you're not going to bring something to me or to one of the elders that is new. In fact, it may be something we struggle with ourselves or we've seen others struggle with and we have helped them. So God doesn't want you hiding. He doesn't want me hiding. He wants us to come to each other and say, "Look," it's not that we just publicize everything that we're struggling with, no, we don't announce it but we go to another brother or sister and we say, "Can you help me? Man to man, woman to woman, can you help me? I'm struggling with something. I need help. Would you pray with me and would you help me?" That's what the church is for. It's so wonderful to be in a community where you don't have to be afraid and then the testimonies become more and more rich because we help each other through those struggles to go to Jesus, to go to the cross, to find our victory over sin in the cross. We have to have help.

So Paul is saying if we could see the riches of what God has done for us in Christ, we would not be trying to fix ourselves isolated, running. We would be helping each other, loving each other, pursuing each other and being okay with being pursued because we know that all it's going to result in is me getting to know my Savior more and getting to know the wonder of his love more. This is the kind of undergirding foundational attitude that needs to be there in a one anothering life. We need each other because we have sin that we are not going to be able to overcome without the help of other believers. God just made us that way. I mean, he has allowed it to be that way. The sin is in us but he has ordained that one of the means of grace that he is going to use in your life is you having other believers minister to you. A lot of it happens on your own as you pray, as you read the word, yes, those things are essential, you've got to be doing it. But there are some things that you're going to have to have help from other believers and why not just be open in getting help all the time. That's what we need to do. Jesus Christ is a great Savior. He has done everything necessary to reconcile us to God and to reconcile us to one another and then what happens is, though, those moments of alienation and hostility can creep into our relationships because of sin, alienation, hostility can start happening among us where there is hatred, there is alienation, separation, the answer is to pursue and to say, "Let's go to the cross," because that should not be named among people who love Jesus Christ. Walk in a manner worthy of the calling for which you've been called. May God help us to do so.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you for the riches of your grace which you have made known to us in Christ Jesus. We thank you that the blood of Jesus truly does take us from being enemies of God and making us your children, and we are thankful that the blood of Christ is also our peace one to one, Christian to Christian. It ought to be evident in our homes. It ought to be evident in all of our relationships with the body of Christ, the church. It ought to be evident in our relationship with every other believer we encounter. It ought to be evident even in our relationship with unbelievers, that we now have the love of God flowing through us. Father, we pray that you would make us one, even as Jesus prayed that we would be one even as you are one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that we would be one, that the world might know that you sent Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.*