

Class Notes on Second Corinthians -- Appendix number two (Ref. note at 2 Cor. 5:14)

IS RECONCILIATION "UNIVERSAL"?

It is imperative that Second Corinthians chapter five be clearly understood.

Consider 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 18, 19. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again . . . And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

Failure to understand these verses has led to two false positions. The problems arising from the "all" in verse 14 and the "world" in verse 19 have led to either "Limited Atonement" (the view that Christ did not die for all men, but only for those chosen to be saved -- the "elect") or "Universal Reconciliation." By taking the "were all dead" (or "all died" -- NASB) in verse 14 as referring to the death mentioned in Gal. 2:20 (as suggested in the Scofield notes) it seems reasonable that all for whom Christ died on Calvary must share in the benefits, and be looked upon as themselves having died in the sense of Gal. 2:20. The limited Atonement man says, "The 'all' for whom Christ died must be the elect -- otherwise everyone would be saved." The Universal Reconciliation adherent would reply, "Everyone must be saved -- otherwise Christ didn't die for all."

Actually the "all died" in verse 14 refers to the death of Rom. 5:12. "Therefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so **DEATH PASSED UPON ALL MEN**, for that all have sinned." When we sinned -- not LIKE Adam, but IN Adam -- we died the death referred to in Eph. 2:1, 5 ("dead in trespasses and sins") and 1 Cor. 15:22 ("In Adam all die").

Paul's argument in verses 14 and 15 may be put this way, "*The fact that Christ died for ALL [not just for the elect] proves that ALL died in Adam, all need His provision. But His death, though for all, is only effective for 'they which live' [verse 15]. Christ died for all [universal provision] that they which live [limited acquisition] should ... live ... unto Him.*" The universal **provision** -- the love of Christ for **all** -- constrains us to be concerned for all. The limited **acquisition** -- the need for faith -- constrains us to preach to them, to "persuade men" (verse. 11).

In verses 18, 19 there are two aspects of reconciliation. One of them is universal in its scope (but should not be referred to as "universal reconciliation" as this term would be totally misunderstood in light of the way it is presently used). When Christ died for all (v. 14) He reconciled the world to God. This aspect of reconciliation does not save anyone -- but it does make the whole world savable! If it saved men, then why should we cry out to them, "Be ye reconciled to God!" (verse 10) when they are already reconciled? A failure to see the difference

between these two concepts (reconciliation as wrought by Christ and reconciliation as implemented by believing the "word of reconciliation") leads to error. As noted above, the Limited Atonement teacher will say, "It must refer to the world of the elect in verse 19, or we have "universal reconciliation." The Universal Reconciliation advocate would reply, "Everyone must be saved or God has failed to reconcile the world to Himself." Both are in serious error. The Limited Atonement believer casts a shadow over the love of God, while the other sets aside His holiness. Both have to wrest Scripture to sustain their false views.¹

-- God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

There are two aspects of reconciliation noted here. In verse 19 it is God who is doing the reconciling. In verse 20 it is man who is called upon to reconcile himself. Notice it is always man reconciled to God, never God reconciled to man. The enmity between God and man is all man's fault, and the change must come in man's position and condition before he can enjoy the peace with God that means salvation. The Cross took away all obstacles to this peace except man's unbelief: man himself must remove this one. God is satisfied with what Christ did at Calvary, making salvation possible. When man also is satisfied with that work, salvation becomes actual and personal.

If the Cross alone completed the full reconciliation in the sense that man is saved, then why the urgent call, in the same passage (v. 20), for man to be reconciled? Verse 21 fits with the above, for Christ became sin for us (His part in reconciliation) that we might (pending our part -- to believe) become the righteousness of God in Him.

The context goes on to speak of salvation and indicates that the believer (the co-laborer in 2 Cor. 6:1) will have received the grace of God (the message entrusted to him -- the "word of reconciliation") in vain (i.e. God's purpose in entrusting it to him, the salvation of others, will be frustrated) if he does not effectively minister it to others. He is warned that the matter is urgent from the point of time, for **NOW** (not at the end of the ages) is the acceptable time, **NOW** is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:1, 2).

William P Heath. <My Documents\Class Notes\New Testament\2corc> on Microsoft Word.

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This appendix is adapted from the author's Bible Study "Universal Reconciliation" --- (< AmiPro\docs\bibstudy\saveall.sam>)

¹Limited Atonement is actually a kind of universalism. Like Universal Reconciliation it teaches that all who are loved by God and for whom Christ died will be saved. The difference between the two teachings is merely the definition of the "world" that God loved and for which Christ died.