

Article: Forgiveness and Reconciliation

What God did in Christ was to reconcile the world unto Himself. How so? By not imputing their sins to them. Where did their sins go? The Apostle Paul writes, “*For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin*” (2 Cor. 5:21). God achieved reconciliation by punishing sin. That’s how He achieved forgiveness. In the obedience, suffering, and death of Jesus, God has joined together forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness and reconciliation amount to the same thing.

Forgiveness means there is no more accusation. Reconciliation is peace. We are not being judged. God is not angry with us. He is our friend, not our enemy. He is our Father. Luther writes in his *Small Catechism* how, with all boldness and confidence, we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father. We pray, “Our Father.”

Our appeal to the identity we received in our baptism is an appeal to the blood and righteousness of Jesus. Atonement means reconciliation. Reconciliation means forgiveness. Forgiveness empowers baptism to save. Baptism, the oral word, the Lord’s Supper, and, yes, the Bible itself are the objects of faith. Faith clings to Jesus. It clings to forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. It clings to the means of grace wherein this forgiveness is located and bestowed.

The faith that receives is the faith that gives. Those who are forgiven forgive. Those who are at peace with God make peace with their neighbour. Those who have received mercy show mercy. The essence of the Divine Law is love. Love God above all things. Love your neighbour as yourself. The essence of the Gospel is love. John writes, “*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*” (1 John 4:10-11).

Believing and confessing go together. You believe that Jesus rose from the dead and you are justified. You confess this Lord Jesus and are saved. You confess in the Creed. You confess at home with your family. You confess whenever given the opportunity to do so. You confess the life and death of Jesus for the forgiveness of all your sins. You confess the Gospel. You believe and you confess.

Charles Porterfield Krauth (A Lutheran pastor, theologian, and educator (1823-1883)) said faith alone makes men Christians, but confession alone marks men as Christians. We confess the Gospel. The Gospel is the forgiveness of sins. We confess the Gospel by forgiving sins. We love because He first loved us. We show mercy, we forgive, and we seek reconciliation with those we have wronged and who have wronged us. This is confessing the Gospel. Freely we have received, freely we give. We give what we have received. In giving what we have received, we confess the Gospel. We confirm its truth. In forgiving, we are forgiven. It is not that our forgiving our neighbour merits or brings about God forgiving us. No, it is that when we forgive as we have been forgiven, our confession of the Gospel is made concrete. Our forgiving is a sign of God’s forgiving.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are bound together by their very nature. They entail the same thing. If you are forgiven, you are reconciled. If you are reconciled, you are forgiven. Forgiveness and reconciliation are also bound together in the giving and receiving. If you are forgiven, you forgive. If you forgive, you are forgiven. Just as our forgiving is a sign that God has forgiven us, our refusal to forgive and be reconciled with our brother is a sign of unbelief. There is no true faith that is not faith in the forgiveness of sins that God grants us for Christ’s sake. There is no true faith that is not expressed in love for our neighbour. The charge often made against conservative, Bible-believing Christians that they are haters because of their opposition to today’s fashionable perversions is a malicious charge, to be sure. But woe be unto us if we do not reckon with the poison of hatred in our hearts.

Faith and love go together. Hatred, malice, the judgmental spirit, and vengeance against those we deem have done us wrong are all signs of unbelief. With the father of the boy who had the deaf and mute spirit, we cry out to our Lord who bore our sins in his body on the cross: “*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!*” (Mark 9:24). He forgives the hatred in our hearts. With this forgiveness comes the power to forgive and be reconciled with our brother.