

Southern Asia Initiative

Together in Hope



Repentance, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

A biblical reflection based on 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

By Rev. Dr. Dhyanchand Carr

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; (NRSV)

Prayer

Lord, forgive our adamant refusal to be a forgiving people. Forgive our pride and arrogance that make it difficult to seek forgiveness from those we have hurt. We repeat the Lord's Prayer without meaning what we say. Forgive all our hypocrisy, too. We pray in the Name of Jesus who prays with us for our renewal. Amen

Biblical Reflection

God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Godself (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). How did that happen? Paul is talking about the whole world and not of just a few elected for salvation. Our concern in this study is to see how that reconciliation with the world takes place in Christ. The simplistic and age-long answer is that God reconciled the estranged world by offering forgiveness through the death of Christ on behalf of all humans. Instead, God would be reconciled with the world only as humans are reconciled among themselves. This is the teaching of Jesus. No one could approach God without first getting reconciled with those who had been offended and hurt by the devotees (Matthew 5:23-24).

Therefore if God reconciled the estranged human community to Godself in Christ, the question arises, how did Christ first and foremost effect repentance and reconciliation within the community of humankind? For an answer to this question, we need to turn to Jesus' self-understanding as the Human



One (Son of Man). Jesus, by this self-understanding, indicated without saying so that he represented all the oppressed of human history. The title "Son of Man" is derived from being the representative of all people who were oppressed. Jesus the Son of Man gathers into himself all the oppressed (the sinned against) of the world.

According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus identified himself with the oppressed and cried the cry of the Psalmist of Psalm 22 on the cross. It was not a cry of dereliction, as usually understood. It was an affirmation of faith as Jesus, in all probability, was meditating on the psalm, which ends with praise and thanksgiving. However, Luke did not see fit to record this cry and instead depicts Jesus as one who prays for the forgiveness of those who were responsible for his crucifixion. Jesus offers forgiveness on behalf of the oppressed to the oppressors. This is how God was reconciling the world to Godself through Christ.

It is not as if those who followed Jesus and hailed him as king did not need to be reconciled with God. They too need to be reconciled. Reconciliation is the sign of the New Creation. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us as we forgive."

The Christian Church teaches forgiveness, recognizing Christ's death as having paid their punishment. But the Church has not learned this lesson of forgiving and asking to be forgiven. The early Church had experienced severe persecution from the time of Domitian until the time of emperor Diocletian for nearly two hundred years. As soon as they became the state church under Constantine, they immediately started persecuting the Jews. Hitler was not the first persecutor of the Jewish people. The Christian Church indulged in it from the moment they became powerful. For the early Christians so involved in a massacre against the Jews, the prayer of Jesus from the cross-recorded in Luke was an embarrassment. So the verse, 'Father forgive them...' (Luke 23:34) has gone missing in many important manuscripts. In all probability, the erasing or deliberately omitting the verse happened in the official scriptoria. The lectors were asked not to read that verse when the work of copying was done.

Therefore, until we learn that horizontal reconciliation must walk side-by-side in seeking reconciliation with God, we shall not participate in the New Creation. All men need to repent to women, giving up assumed patriarchal privileges, and women should express their forgiveness when such repentance is expressed. All who benefit from racism and racist policies should repent and seek forgiveness from the racially oppressed communities of Africans, indigenous people driven to reservations, Dalits oppressed in the caste system, and those exploited by capitalism. Forgiveness can happen only via the mediation of Christ, the Son of Man to whom God has given the authority to declare forgiveness. The oppressed represented by the metaphor of the lambs which are among wolves should never become wolves. Instead, their responsibility is to convert the wolves to become like lambs and their friends.

Thanks be to God who saw to it that the crucial means of reconciliation recorded in Luke did not get erased. But even so, the traditional understanding of forgiveness - through Jesus bearing our punishment - remains strong. God is non-retributive. God does not need to effect legal punishment before offering forgiveness. This distorted image of God needs to be abandoned. God longs for human reconciliation and to be reconciled with the whole world so that there may be a new community of peace and justice.

Questions for Reflection

1. From whom should you seek forgiveness? What about the church? The nation?
2. Jesus identified himself with the oppressed. What do you know about oppressed communities and peoples in Southern Asia?
3. How might we have participated in the oppression of peoples in Southern Asia? How might we seek reconciliation?

About the Author

Rev. Dr. Dhyanchand Carr is an ordained pastor of the Church of South India, a Dalit activist, a renowned New Testament scholar and a former member of the faculty at the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, India. His main interest is to help people read the Bible from the point of view of the Proclamation of Jesus on the Just Reign of God and that it was Good News to the poor.