

THE RECONCILED WORLD



Restoring the Reconciled World Part 1

T. M. Moore

A ReVision Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing

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Welcome to *The Reconciled World*

Two teachings of the apostle Paul govern this series on *Restoring the Reconciled World*. We'll meet both of them in this first installment.

The first teaching is that Jesus Christ – by His life, death, resurrection, and ascension – has reconciled the world and all things in it to God. A new *Pax Christiana* has been inaugurated, and now the world is being reorganized into a new economy and dispensation – the Kingdom of God.

Second, God has given to us, His people, a ministry of reconciliation, which takes the form of restoring the reconciled world's freedom and goodness to the praise and glory of God. This is a work to which every believer is called. It's a work that anticipates a coming day of the restoration of all things, and thus bears witness to the fact that Christ's rule is coming on earth as it is in heaven.

In this first part of our series, we'll take a look at this work of reconciliation, in order to discover our role in it.

We hope you find these studies helpful. Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Reconciliation

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Romans 5.10

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that 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 Corinthians 5.18, 19

Peace!

On May 8, 1945, all of Europe and the United States wept tears of joy at the announcement that Nazi forces had surrendered and peace had returned to Europe. On August 8 of that same year, the Japanese military surrendered, and peace came to the Pacific and the Orient. A broken and shattered world rejoiced, even amid the rubble and ruin of six long years of war.

On those dates, enemies were reconciled. Fault was admitted by the guilty; new forms of government were set in place, and the work of making reconciliation a reality began in earnest. With the United States leading the way, efforts began to rebuild Europe and Japan in a process that would involve the riches and magnanimity of the victors and the hard work of the vanquished. The worst of enemies became, in time, the best of friends, as they labored together to restore and advance the wellbeing and flourishing of the ruined world. Within a single generation, the world was restored to greater peace, productivity, and prosperity than it had ever known.

Similarly, we who believe in Jesus Christ – we who were once His enemies, bent on usurping His Lordship and rewriting His Law to suit our own interests – have been reconciled to God through the victory of our Lord Jesus on the cross. When Jesus, with His dying breath, announced, “It is finished”, He declared to the world that the enmity was destroyed, the debt was cancelled, and a new era of collaboration and flourishing had begun. Three days later, when He rose from the dead; and forty days after that, when He ascended into heaven, He presented His own glorified body before the Father as the Treaty of Peace between God and the world. He had defeated the ancient foe and established peace for the ruined world, reconciling it in whole and part to God.

On the first Christian Pentecost, Jesus and the Father poured out the Holy Spirit to the world; in Him, and in the Word He makes known, they provided all the vision, plans, and resources necessary for restoring the reconciled world. A world ruined by centuries of Satan’s lies, violence, and ravishing lay before those who had received the Spirit. A new government was in place; a new Kingdom and economy were launched; and the work of restoring the reconciled world to flourishing and glory began.

That work of restoration has been entrusted to everyone who names the Name of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In the installments that follow, we will consider the work of restoring the reconciled world, so that we might understand our calling and duty within this new regime, and enter the joy and power of the Lord in carrying out His work of reconciliation.

The process of reconciliation

The reconciliation of the world, which Jesus accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection, unfolds in stages. Some of those took place within the unseen realm; most of them pertain to the world of time, space, people, work, and things. All of them are God’s work for His glory and goodness.

Peace. Having announced the peace of God from the cross, Jesus secured it by His resurrection, crushing the head of the old serpent, whom He had previously bound and banished (Matt. 4.1-11; 12.22-29), and

overcoming the hold of death on the world. On the cross, Jesus presented His sin-stained body to Father, Who received His work, and, following His resurrection and ascension, clothed Him with the garments of a King, and seated Him at His own right hand (Zech. 3.1-5; Ps. 110.1). The heavenly Father – the Ancient of Days – presented King Jesus with an eternal Kingdom (Dan. 7.13, 14), while all of heaven rejoiced with resounding shouts (Ps. 47). Jesus had reconciled the world to the Father. Now the world could be set back on course according to God’s original intentions and design. The work of restoring the reconciled world could proceed.

End of hostilities. In the Gospel, Jesus announces that our warfare has ceased (Is. 40.1, 2); peace has been obtained, and whosoever will come may enter the peace and reconciliation He has achieved (Acts 2.32-39; Eph. 2.14-18).

Terms of peace. Jesus declares the terms of peace: He gives His Kingdom to all who enter His peace and are set aside for His purposes (Dan. 7.18), a Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18); and He calls all who enter that Kingdom to seek it, and the righteousness and glory of God, as the defining priority and motif of their lives (Matt. 6.33; 1 Thess. 2.12).

Work of restoration. They who enter the peace of King Jesus come with ruined lives, broken cultures, and a world in need of rebuilding. All the saints of God are called to good works. They have been redeemed for this (Eph. 2.8, 9); they must work out their peace with God in good works (Phil. 2.12); and they must do so with sincere zeal and constant readiness to express the goodness of God in all their words and deeds, for thanksgiving and glory (Tit. 2.11-14; 3.8, 14; 2 Cor. 4.15; Matt. 5.13-16; 1 Cor. 10.31).

All the while, and to ensure progress in this outward work of restoration, the Spirit and Word of God are at work in the souls of the redeemed, restoring those who are the image-bearers of God into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Phil. 2.13).

The end of reconciliation. The work of restoration must be continuous, self-denying, and sacrificial – like the work of Jesus Himself. We know that in this life, in history as we know it, we shall only partially succeed in our mandate. While God is pleased to see that work make progress in the here and now, only in the there and then – in the new heavens and new earth – will the glory and goodness of the world be fully restored, and the glorious reconciliation of Christ be complete.

God’s work and ours

The psalmists cry over and over to God, “Restore us!” The work of reconciliation, in all its stages, is God’s work. It follows His plan, operates according to His protocols and power, requires His gifts and strength, and works from within those who have entered His peace for the purpose of making all things new.

God is at work in all who believe, to make them willing and able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all they’ve ever dared to ask or think (Phil. 2.13; Eph. 3.20), to the end that the Presence and power of Jesus Christ might fill all things (Eph. 1.15-23; 4.8-10) and the knowledge of the glory of God might cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2.14). We who believe in Jesus are called to this great work, and privileged to share in it with joy. But we must be sure about the work of reconciliation that Jesus has accomplished. For only as we understand the scope and implications of *His* work will we be able to take up *ours*.

For Reflection

1. Christ’s work of reconciling the world to God is both *event* and *process*. Explain.
2. How does the *process* of reconciliation proceed?
3. How does the work of restoring the reconciled world pertain to you?

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Next Steps – Preparation: How would you describe the state of restoration in your life and Personal Mission Field at this time? Spend some time meditating on this, then offer your observations and conclusions to the Lord in prayer.

2 The Scope of Reconciliation

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that 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 Corinthians 5.18, 19

God's love for His world

In his book, *God's Good World*, Jonathan R. Wilson defines reconciliation as “God’s act of aligning all things in their proper relationship to God through Christ’s cross.” We note that he picks up on Paul’s statement that “all things are of God” and are thus included as aim and beneficiaries of Christ’s work.

He continues, “This reconciliation is part of the redemption of creation that ends in the new creation.” Here Wilson affirms what we mentioned in our first installment, that the work of reconciliation is only brought to completion in the new heavens and new earth.

Wilson finishes his definition of reconciliation by saying, “In the cross, evil is exposed as evil and in this is rightly aligned with God. In the cross, giving and receiving in love is revealed as life and in this is rightly aligned with God. To use an image that we should not press too far, in the cross, the world’s account with God is reconciled: debts are revealed, accounted for, and settled; creation is revealed as gift and blessing, and its life and telos made manifest in Jesus.” The *life* of creation is Jesus. The *telos* or end of creation is Jesus. We who are part of creation have as our life and telos Jesus Christ, for we shall be like Him when at last we see Him as He is (1 Jn. 3.1-3).

In the meantime, the Spirit and Word of God are at work within us, as aspects of God’s creation, to transform us into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). This is a gradual and progressive project that requires us working according to the protocols and priorities of the Holy Spirit to realize that which is well-pleasing to God – that which is rightly aligned with God, as Jonathan R. Wilson might say.

When Jesus reported to Nicodemus concerning God’s great love, He testified that the scope of that love took in all of creation – the world (Jn. 3.16). What God loved so much, He sent His Son to redeem and reconcile, that all the world might realize its proper life and telos through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even a cursory look at the work of our Lord Jesus Christ reveals the world-healing scope of the work of reconciliation He accomplished.

Christ the model of reconciliation

As we look to Jesus, we see in Him a concern to bring the love of God to the entire world – all of creation. Jesus brought realignment to human souls – all who would believe in Him – by granting forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. His work of reconciliation thus accomplishes peace with God for all who believe, and inaugurates the work of God’s Spirit whereby the soul and life are increasingly remade in the likeness of Jesus.

Jesus was also concerned about matters of culture. He blasted the religious traditions of His day as having departed from Scripture and become captive to the ideas of men. He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, and declared to all its proper purpose and function. He defied the established civil order by refusing to back away from offending Roman claims that Caesar alone was God. He taught right ways of thinking about marriage, business practices, neighborly living, and law. He launched the Church as a new cultural entity, to be the sign and outpost of His Kingdom on earth. He made Himself the final authority on these and all other matters of culture, insisting that His Word define the rightly-aligned parameters of all cultural life.

He taught about beauty; exercised authority over seas and trees; commanded fish into nets; darkened the

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world at His death; and caused it to tremble at His resurrection. Not even creation itself is beyond the reach of Christ's reconciling work.

God loves the world, and everything in it; and He sent Jesus to reset and realign the cosmos and its components so that they could realize God's life and telos, as He originally intended.

As we take up the work of restoring the reconciled world, we look to Jesus to guide us, and to mark out the broad parameters or categories of our work. And we strive to love the world as God does, so that in Jesus we can do whatever is in our power to reset and realign the world – from the souls of people to the groaning and travailing creation itself – so that *all things* might return to God's plan for life and telos.

The focus of our work

The work of reconciliation is granted to the Body of Christ, His Church, as part of their calling to the Kingdom and glory of God. We should expect the healthy and growing presence of the Church in the world to affect all aspects of the world according to God's life and telos. In fact, this is precisely what we have seen throughout the ages. Not only have churches pursued a commitment to win lost souls to Jesus Christ, and to nurture saved souls to maturity in Him; churches have also worked to bring the beauty, goodness, and truth of God to culture, institutions, social relations, and all other aspects of life in creation. Christians have labored in all legitimate fields of endeavor to bring Jesus to light by good works and true words. Our forebears in the faith have understood that, for the time allotted to us, we must endeavor to bring the goodness of God to light in the land of the living, to glorify Him in even the most quotidian of daily activities, and thus to show Jesus to the world, and to fill the world with His Presence (Eph. 4.8-10).

This must be the focus of our work as well. As believers, we are called to restore God's life and telos to the world. We cannot all do everything, of course. We must begin with ourselves, looking to the restoration and nurture of our souls, and living in our spheres of influence (2 Cor. 10.13-18) as those who have been sent there as ambassadors of the rule of King Jesus, for the progress of God's Kingdom and the glory of His Name. Nothing in our lives is outside the scope of what Jesus has reconciled to God, or of what is to be restored to His life and telos.

Believers are called to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12). Within that framework and calling, each of us is sent as Jesus was sent to bring near the Kingdom of God and to shed the light of God's truth and love on those parts and people of the world with whom we have to do (Jn. 20.21). We will only know the working power of God and the utter joy and blessedness of our salvation as we take up the work assigned to us of restoring the reconciled world, beginning right where we are.

For Reflection

1. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the *life* and *telos* of your life? How much of your life?
2. Can you cite some ways in which Christians have affected culture and society as part of their work of restoring the reconciled world?
3. The world today seems increasingly *not* in the process of being reset and realigned with God. Why do you think this is so?

Next Steps – Transformation: Commit the day ahead to God. Ask Him to show you one area, besides your soul, where you can begin working more pointedly to restore the reconciled world.

3 The Work of Reconciliation

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation... 2 Corinthians 5.18

The ministry of reconciliation

So far in this study, we have been laying a groundwork for what Paul intended when he wrote that God “has given us the ministry of reconciliation”. We who are called to the Kingdom and glory of God are charged with carrying on the work Jesus began to do, by working to restore the reconciled world to its proper life and telos, or end. *Restoration* is the particular work of *reconciliation* which God has assigned to us. For many believers, this will be a new way of thinking about what it means to be a Christian. We’d better make sure we understand just what God “has given us”.

The place to begin in understanding the ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us – the work of restoration – is by looking to the great Reconciler Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ. The work of reconciliation was appointed to Jesus from eternity past, when, in the counsel of the divine Trinity, the plan for the creation, redemption, reconciliation, and restoration of the world was outlined before the world began.

It makes sense that the work of reconciliation Jesus accomplished should provide a template for us in pursuing our part of the work of reconciliation. Jesus’ work of reconciliation entailed five specific stages, all of which began with His becoming incarnate in the world. Jesus performed His work of reconciliation in a human body, at a particular time in history, and among a peculiar people and culture. This will be the same for us as well; so let’s take a closer look at the five specific stages of Jesus’ work of reconciliation, and consider what they mean for us.

The binding of Satan

The work of the incarnate Christ in reconciling the world to God began in the Judean wilderness, as Jesus confronted and overcame the devil. He bound Satan from being able to further impede the work God had sent Him to do (Matt. 4.1-11). When Jesus said, later in His ministry, that He had “bound” the strong man, He was referring to the defeat and routing of the devil in the wilderness. And it was against that backdrop, He explained, that the plundering of Satan’s domain was now proceeding apace.

Binding the devil is part of our work of reconciliation. We must be able to recognize his wiles and temptations, submit to God and resist the devil, and find the way of escape, lest we fall into sin (Prov. 1.17; Jms. 4.7; 1 Cor. 10.13). Just as Jesus confronted and sent demons packing, and overcame all subsequent temptations, so we must expect that our work of reconciliation will be an ongoing struggle of spiritual warfare to keep the devil at bay, grow through every temptation, and continue bringing our work of restoration to everything in our lives that the devil would prefer to keep in ruins (Eph. 6.10-20; 1 Pet. 5.8-10).

Blazing the reconciliation trail

By fulfilling all the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19), Jesus provided the righteousness (holiness) without which no one will see the Lord, and no work of restoration can be accomplished (Heb. 13.5). We must learn Jesus (Eph. 4.17-24), put on Jesus (Rom. 13.14), walk the path Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2.1-6), and be transformed into the very likeness of Jesus and His righteousness (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Jesus blazed the trail of righteousness, and He commands us to seek His Kingdom and righteousness as the defining priority and motif of our lives (Matt. 6.33).

At the very least, this requires regular reading, study, and meditation in God’s Law, and all His Word (Ps. 1; Matt. 5.17-19; 2 Tim. 3.15-17). Only as we are steeped in the Word of God will we hear and obey the Spirit as

He teaches us God's Law, convicts us of sin and righteousness, and empowers us to will and do the righteousness that pleases God (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Jn. 16.8-11; Phil. 2.13). The more we find God's Word to be joyous spiritual nutrition for every aspect of our lives (Jer. 15.16), the better equipped we will be for those good works of righteousness, imitating our Lord Jesus, by which the reconciled world becomes restored in goodness and glory.

Cancellation of sin

On the cross, Jesus took away the sins of the world. He has freed us from the consequences of our sin, and He calls us to increase in His power over it. We must always be about the business of being cleansed from sin. The law of sin still operates in our not-yet-fully-sanctified souls. We expect to sin, but must not be content to languish there, like some upside-down turtle, struggling to be righted. We must nurture a sincere and constant hatred of all sin (Ps. 97.10). If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 Jn. 1.8). If we do not confess our sins, the weight of them will grind us down (Ps. 38.1-8), God will not hear our prayers (Ps. 66.18), and we won't care about the work of restoration, or about anything that does not immediately gratify some personal want.

Further, we must take up our own cross daily, denying our selfish desires, setting our mind on the things that are above where Christ is seated in heavenly places, and giving ourselves in loving service to others (Matt. 10.38; Col. 3.1-3; Jn. 13.1-15). The best way to keep sin cancelled in our lives is to follow Jesus, according to God's Word, in serving others for His glory (Rom. 12.1-3; Phil. 2.1-11).

The resurrection life

By His resurrection from the dead and ascent into heaven, Jesus gained the eternal Kingdom of God – the power for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Dan. 7.13, 14; 1 Cor. 4.20; Rom. 14.17, 18). He inaugurated an entirely new domain and dispensation – the divine economy of grace and truth. And He has given that to His saints in the Person of the Holy Spirit (Dan. 7.18; Acts 2).

By growing in Kingdom life – righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit – we realize the power that is making all things new (Rev. 22.5), and that enables us to take up that part of the ministry of reconciliation which has been given to us, the work of restoring the reconciled world.

The world to come

Finally, in the world that is to come, Jesus is preparing an eternal dwelling-place for His people; and He will come again to take us there. He calls us to seek the city which is to come (Heb. 11.8-16), meditate on its beauty, rejoice that our names are written in the ledger of that city (Lk. 10.20), and live in the here and now as though we expected the there and then to evidence itself in everything we do (Matt. 6.10).

Jesus has shown us the work of reconciliation that has been given to us. He has established the foundation, and He has secured the end of the reconciliation of all things. And He is at work within us, willing and doing of His own pleasure, by the exceedingly abundant power of His Word and Spirit, to move the work of restoration and reconciliation forward in each of our lives and over all the earth.

May we receive this work that has been given to us, and resolve energetically to apply ourselves to it every day.

For reflection

1. What did Paul mean when he wrote that God has given us the work of reconciliation?
2. Why must we look to Jesus to understand this work? How do we look to Jesus?
3. How should we expect looking to Jesus as the template of our work to affect our daily lives?

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Next steps – Transformation: In prayer, examine the state of the work of restoration as it is proceeding in your life, according to each of the five stages discussed here.

4 The Starting Point of Reconciliation

*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has **reconciled** in the body of His flesh through death, **to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight**— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. Colossians 1.21-23 (emphasis added)*

Living exemplars

It may be that some doubt the importance of that ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us – the work of restoring the reconciled world. They may believe that, having been justified by grace through faith, we are assured of a place with God forever, and now they must only hold fast to their confession until the Lord takes them home to glory or returns in power at the end of time. Certainly this great blessed hope is true and integral to a sincere appreciation of the work of Christ and the gift of salvation. True, but incomplete and insufficient for us to realize increasing measures of the full and abundant life we have in Christ, the great salvation He has bestowed upon us, and the progress of His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Did God – through the glorious life, horrible sufferings, and victorious resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus – reconcile the world to Himself, merely to leave it languishing in sin? Is He content for it to groan and travail until the return of Jesus? Indeed, not; the creation and all its creatures and systems and cultures and societies groan and travail, though reconciled to God, eagerly anticipating the restoring work of the sons and daughters of God, that the freedom and joy and power they have come to know in the Gospel might be brought to bear on creation in whole and part (Rom. 8.19- 22).

But in this work of restoration, given to us by God, we may not skip any steps. And the first step, the daily and ongoing step, the most important and critical step in restoration, is the calling to work out our salvation in fear and trembling before the Lord (Phil. 2.12). God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ. He does not save us merely that we might languish and groan and travail in sin, as we did before our reconciliation. Paul insists that God, Who is at work within us, with exceedingly abundant power (Phil. 2.12; Eph. 3.20), is determined to present us to Himself holy, and blameless, and above reproach. If we are truly grounded in faith, and steadfast in the hope of the Gospel, we will embrace the work of restoration that applies to us, as living exemplars of the larger calling of restoration. It was to this end that Paul labored so diligently in the ministry of preaching Jesus and making disciples: “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (Col. 1.28, 29).

First fruit of creation

With this, the apostle James heartily agrees: “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures” (Jms. 1.18).

Our experience of salvation provides a kind of pattern, or template, for thinking about how the grace and truth of God should affect the rest of creation. God clearly intends the redeeming and reconciling work of Christ to reach to all His creatures. The groaning and travail creation is waiting for the revelation of the sons and daughters of God, that it might share in the freedom we have obtained. The same is true of all the culture we make and use each day, and of the larger world we inhabit, and all its systems, institutions, aspirations, products, and protocols. What happens with us as believers is the first fruit of God’s Kingdom field, where He is laboring to bring forth a harvest to His glory in every aspect of life.

We have seen how Jesus worked to achieve the reconciliation of all things, and, as we shall see in this series, those five stages of work apply to us as well. Yet pursuing those works – daily advancing in our spiritual warfare, walking holy paths, overcoming the power of sin, increasing in Kingdom righteousness, and living toward the world to come – will neither appeal to us nor be of such compelling attraction that we take them

on earnestly and continuously, until we establish a proper focus for restoration, beginning in ourselves.

Let me suggest four aspects of such a focus, which we must give ourselves to continuously, and encourage one another in daily.

Focus for restoration

First, we must develop *a continuous focus on Christ*, in Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Ps. 16.8; Col. 2.2, 3; 3.1-3; Heb. 2.5-9). We must see Jesus in all His righteousness; attend to all His teaching; observe His manner of relating to others; and see Him exalted in glory in all His radiant brilliance and power. This vision of Jesus can guide us in thinking about each creature and its place in the divine economy. Through meditation, study, and prayer, as we bring each creature, every thing, before the exalted Lord and King of all creation, we will come to understand the unique place, purpose, and qualities of each one.

Second, we must nurture *a vision of the restored creation*, of its most perfect state and contribution to the divine economy, and of its relation and contribution to the creatures nearest to it. Freedom – for which the groaning creation longs – means each creature realizing its full potential for goodness, according to God’s purposes and will. All things can bring glory to God, no matter how trivial or common, and our task is to bring the work of restoration to bear on all creatures, that they might be released to praise God as He intends (Ps. 148).

Third, we must focus on *acquiring the skills* that will enable us to attend to the “all things” of our own lives, that every interaction we have with them – people, places, or things – can shine with the light of Christ’s reconciliation. Such a focus requires constant prayer and learning, and seeing ahead to the work of each day, that God might show us how to do our work of restoration for His glory (Ps. 90.16, 17).

Finally, we must focus on all our *work of restoration as an act of worship*, offering ourselves, our time, our efforts, and the world we engage in as a sacrifice of praise to God. What will this require? How can we fulfill this great calling to be living sacrifices to God, and to offer up the work of our hands as a sweet offering in His nostrils? Unless we put in place such a vision and focus of our work, we are not likely to realize this great objective.

We are the first fruits, but not the whole harvest, of God’s redemptive work. If we love His world as He does, we will work to bring the benefits of Christ’s salvation and reconciliation to it by every possible means.

For reflection

1. Why must the work of restoration begin with ourselves and our lives?
2. What does it mean to nurture a vision of restoration? How can such a vision be sustained?
3. Why is it important that we see our work of restoration as an act of worship? What would that look like in your life each day?

Next steps – Transformation: Meditate on all the ways you will engage the reconciled world today. Pray about each one, and offer each to the Lord for His glory. Envision your day as a day of restoring the reconciled world, and seek the filling of God’s Spirit.

5 Natural-Born Restorers

*“So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,
The crawling locust,
The consuming locust,
And the chewing locust,
My great army which I sent among you.
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
And praise the name of the LORD your God,
Who has dealt wondrously with you;
And My people shall never be put to shame.
Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel:
I am the LORD your God
And there is no other.
My people shall never be put to shame. Joel 2.25-27*

Made for restoration

If you think about it, restoring things comes naturally to human beings; it’s almost as if the work of restoration is built into the warp and woof of our souls. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, and for us, this takes the form of restoring the world Christ has reconciled to the Father, so that more of His glory comes to light in the world.

We are natural-born restorers. Large and well-known organizations exist, for example: to restore rights long withheld or denied (NAACP); animals to health and happiness (ASPCA); natural ecologies to health and flourishing (The Nature Conservancy); old buildings to their original glory (National Trust for Historic Preservation); people who lose their jobs to the workforce (U. S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration); art works to their original condition (The Pennsylvania Art Conservatory); and even the lawns in our community to a state of neatness and health, week after week.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines the work of art restoration or conservation this way: “any attempt to conserve and repair architecture, paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, and objects of the decorative arts (furniture, and so on) that have been adversely affected by negligence, willful damage, or, more usually, the inevitable decay caused by the effects of time and human use on the materials of which they are made.” Similarly, *Britannica* defines ecological restoration as “the process of repairing sites in nature whose biological communities...and ecosystems have been degraded or destroyed.” Wikipedia – an increasingly reliable source of information – in an article on “Conservation and restoration of cultural heritage” outlines the kind of work such restoration requires: “Conservation activities include preventive conservation, examination, documentation, research, treatment, and education.” Apparently, there’s a lot that goes into all these many works of restoration in which we as humans engage.

Let’s face it, we don’t like it when things fall into disarray. We are at war with the law of entropy. We dust and vacuum our homes, clean our bodies and clothes, wash our dishes, recycle our recyclables, and even sometimes pick up after ourselves. We upgrade our computers, get new glasses, and change our oil every 3,000 miles, just to conserve and restore things we use every day.

Restoring things comes naturally to us. The problem is not that restoration (the particular aspect of the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus has assigned to us) isn’t something we don’t care to do. The problem is that we don’t fully understand the scope or work of restoration according the model God Himself outlines in His Word. We’re made for restoring things, and we’re actually pretty good at it. But our work of restoration can have more powerful effects on the world when we understand it as God intends.

Identifying the problem

In the case of Israel during Joel's day, the problem facing the people of Israel was that locusts had ruined their crops and land. But the wasted land was only a symbol of what was going on in the souls of God's people. The army of locusts that savaged the land of Israel was a work of God's judgment against the sins of His people (Joel 1.15-17). The wasted land was not the problem; the problem was wasted souls, neglected, degraded, abused, and in disarray (Joel 2.12-17). The restoration of the land was a sign that souls were in need of being restored. Once the souls were restored, the restoring of the land could proceed with the blessing of God. God Himself would restore the wasted years, as the people set their souls on Him and worked the land as they had been appointed to do.

The problem causing the need to restore human rights, abused pets, languishing old buildings, works of art, unkempt lawns, dirty clothes, and wasted ecosystems is, in a very real sense, the same problem faced by ancient Israel. A spiritual law of entropy operates in the souls of people, and throughout God's creation, and causes the good world to groan and travail rather than to flourish and abound. Sin affects our relationship with everything in the world, and the world shows the effects of our sins in needing continuous restoration.

So the problem requiring the work of restoration is, in the first instance, the sin which operates throughout the world, affecting creation's proper freedom and flourishing, and making it necessary for sinful people to do the work of restoration in practically every area of life, over and over again. If we can get on top of the sin problem in our souls and lives, we'll be in a better position to bring restoration to the reconciled world in many other areas as well.

For goodness' sake

The Scriptures insist that the goodness of God is in all the earth (Ps. 33.5). We don't have to look very far to see how true that is. God loves the world so much that He causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on all parts and people in it (Matt. 5.45-58). He makes plants to grow season after season, and provides a continuous supply of other essentials for our wellbeing (Ps. 104.10-24). God restores the goodness we consume, or destroy, or neglect. And His work of restoring the creation is a kind of model for our own, which we are following – wittingly or otherwise – in all our own restoring work.

By addressing the sin problem in our lives – through confession, repentance, and obedience to God's Word – we make room for the Holy Spirit to do that work of renewing our souls that prepares us for restoring the reconciled world in whole and part. And that entails a good bit of work – identifying opportunities, diagnosing needs, taking corrective actions, putting in place preventive measures, reviewing and revising, training and educating, and more.

We need neither fight nor fear God's calling to the ministry of reconciliation. We simply need to broaden our focus, sharpen our skills, enlarge our vision, and join with Christ the Reconciler, as He works daily to make all things new.

For Reflection

1. Why do people create organizations to restore things?
2. What are some ways that you are already practicing restoration?
3. How can we sharpen our focus on the "all things" God has called us to restore in this part of the ministry of reconciliation?

Next Steps – Preparation: Make a list of things you will do today that are forms of the work of restoration. Commit those works to God in prayer, then take them on as part of your calling to the ministry of reconciliation.

6 Making All Things New

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." Revelation 21.5

What in heaven is Jesus doing on earth?

The question arises: Since Jesus, having ascended to the Father's right hand, has reconciled the world to God, and is now ruling in the heavenly places (Ps. 110), what in heaven is Jesus doing on earth?

He answers that question simply: "I am making all things new." Having reconciled all things to God, and begun the plundering of Satan's holdings, Jesus is bringing the newness of His Kingdom to "all things". He is making all things new; all that He has reconciled to the Father, He is now investing with Kingdom newness, polishing it to a sheen of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18).

And how is He doing that? He is at work within all who believe in Him, willing and doing of God's good pleasure (Phil. 2.13), poised and ready to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all we have ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20).

This broken, sad, and weary world is not running down, as evolutionary naturalists insist. The law of entropy, which declares that everything tends to decay toward disorder and disarray, is simply a mirage. It looks only at the three-dimensional world of stuff and time; while Jesus rules a four-dimensional world, where the Spirit is advancing His rule on earth as in heaven. Jesus is making all things new. He is making sinful people new, as you have perhaps experienced. He is remaking fallen men and women into His own likeness, increasing daily in them even as their old selves decrease. He is giving them new ideas, new vision, new words to speak, and new works to do, the effect of which is to bring His grace, truth, and dominion to bear on the things of their lives. Thus their relationships are renewed in Jesus. Their daily tasks, duties, work, and other responsibilities take on a newness and freshness that advertises the hope of glory in which they live (Rom. 5.1; 1 Pet. 3.15). All the roles they fulfill in life – spouse, worker, parent, child, colleague, neighbor – shine with the newness of the indwelling Christ, making them light, salt, and leaven for a new world order.

What in heaven is Jesus doing on earth? He is making all things new, through the people He has renewed in His Spirit, and according to the ever-new and always reliable truth of His Word.

Which is just to say that Jesus is carrying out in and through us the ministry of reconciliation which has been given to us, that of restoring the world to its proper freedom and flourishing for the glory of God.

A restoration vision

Jesus holds a vision of the world *He made* being *made new in all things*. He sees the world not as a cup half-empty, but one that is full of potential, with the goodness of the Lord everywhere present (Ps. 33.5), and everywhere ready to be brought to light in the land of the living (Ps. 27.13). Jesus sees us as new creatures, growing in grace to become more like Him every day, living and bearing witness to Him for the progress of His righteous, peaceable, and joyous rule on earth. He sees our marriages as abounding in mutual love, edification, and support (Eph. 5.22-33); our churches as cities on a hill, bringing peace, beauty, and joy to their communities (Mic. 4.1-8; Ps. 48.1-3); and all our involvement in the everyday activities of life, work, culture, and community being done in such a way as to glorify our Father and His (1 Cor. 10.31).

And this means Jesus sees the world rather differently than the way most of His people do. Jesus sees the world as fraught with potential to abound in goodness and glory, whereas we tend to see the world as something that grinds us down, something we long to escape, and yet something we can't quite seem to shed. To Jesus, the world is a wheat field to be sown, cultivated, and harvested for an abundance of holy fruit. To

many of us, the world is weed field, waiting to be burned. Jesus sees the world, like a wondrous stereogram, gradually and increasingly yielding the knowledge of the glory of the Lord to all the peoples of the earth (Hab. 2.14; Ps. 67). We tend to see it as a disaster, going to hell in a hand bucket.

Jesus sees the world as a vast and glorious make-over project, for which He daily enlists those in whom He is bringing forth the fruit of new life in the Kingdom. We see it as a place to make a living, eke out some measure of happiness, and leave behind when the Lord finally comes to take us home.

Clearly, we need a new vision. We need Jesus' vision of restoration, and with that vision, the willingness – no, *eagerness* – to tap into that exceedingly-abundant-working-within-us power for making all things new.

According to His Word

The words of our Lord Jesus are true and faithful. He says His Word is sufficient to equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17). He says His Word is powerful and active (Heb. 4.12); that it brings life and newness (Jn. 6.63); radiates His glory, and transforms us into His likeness (2 Cor. 3.12-18); illuminates the path of righteousness and good works (Ps. 25.4, 5, 10-14); and has power not only to uphold the entire cosmos, but to transform it for the glory of God (Heb. 1.3; Matt. 5.13-16).

Jesus commands us to receive His Word and to learn from Him. He expects us to delight in His Word, to feed on and devour it, to learn it line upon line and precept upon precept, to plant ourselves by it and root ourselves deeply in it so that we bring forth fruit for His glory in-season and out. The reason the work of restoration – of making all things new – does not appeal to so many of us is that we do not have the vision of Jesus for His world, and His Word is not living and active within us. The sooner we admit this, and begin to take steps to redress this situation, the sooner we will discover the excitement, joy, wonder, power, and fruitfulness that come from pursuing the ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us.

This world is not what many of us think it is. It is not a thing to be avoided, despised, or simply used. While we eschew *worldliness*, we must love the *world*, and “all things” in it, as God the Father does. He gave His very Best to save, reconcile, and restore this world (Jn. 3.16), and He is looking to us to do the same.

Jesus is making all things new, and He calls us to step in the yoke with Him, plow new furrows, sow new seeds, and participate with Him in nurturing the world to fruitfulness in the glory of God the Father.

For Reflection

1. Where is Jesus “making all things new”? What does this include?
2. What evidence do you see that Jesus is making all things new in your life?
3. How does your view of the world compare with that of our Lord Jesus?

Next Steps – Transformation: In prayer, thank Jesus for everything in your world – your own part of His wheat field. Thank Him, and ask Him to show you one area where He can use you to make something new today.

7 Toward the Day of Reconciliation

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. Acts 3.19-21

The restoration of all things

The “restoration of all things” is a theme that runs throughout Scripture, as Peter noted. The Bible from Moses through all the Writings, Prophets, Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation points our attention forward to a day when the Lord Jesus Christ will restore the cosmos to its “very good” (Gen. 1.31) condition, in which all that is evil, corrupting, decadent, and opposed to God will be no more.

The writer of Hebrews insists that the great saints of Scripture lived toward that day, longing for the City to Come, when all things will be filled with the fullness of God (cf. Heb. 11.8-16). Peter explained that the world to come will consist of “a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 1.13). In the light of that, he called his readers to be always “looking forward to these things” and to “be diligent to be found in Him in peace, without spot and blameless (2 Pet. 1.14). He calls us to be “holy in conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3.12).

The anticipation of and longing for a coming day of the restoration of all things should have observable effects in our lives in the here and now. If we fail actively to live toward this coming day, Peter says, we will be in danger of “being led away with the error of the wicked” (2 Pet. 3.17). Instead, we are to be working for the restoration of all things unto Christlikeness, beginning in our soul (2 Cor. 3.12-18), working out into every aspect of our lives (1 Cor. 10.31-11.1), shaping our churches (Eph. 4.11-16), and bringing the salt, light, and leaven of Kingdom living to bear on the world around us in all its aspects (Matt. 5.13-16).

Jesus Christ, exalted at the right hand of God, is making all things new *now*. The day is coming when He will complete that work, but He is working even now, by His Spirit, in His saints, according to His Word, sending and dispatching His faithful servants to bring days of repentance and refreshing to the world, sure as the morning dew (Ps. 110.1-3).

What this entails, and how we must live toward the coming day of the restoration of all things, will be the subject of subsequent installments in this series. For now, two foundational attitudes and practices are essential for us as we live toward that great day.

A time of repentance

First is repentance. The word for repentance in the Greek is *μετάνοια*, *metanoia*, and it means something like “a change of mind.” More to the point, *metanoia* is a change of thinking – of outlook, disposition, thoughts, and inclinations. Repentance involves recognizing and turning away from everything that denies God, transgresses His Law, refuses to submit to Jesus, lacks faith, and insists on doing things one’s own way. All such rebellion is sin, and repentance looks at such thinking and living with disgust, even hatred (Ps. 97.10), and resolves to be done with it, once and for all.

Repentance is essential for coming to faith in Jesus Christ. We will not be converted to Christ, Peter says, without repentance. But repentance is a discipline that we must engage daily, as often as it is needed. By the work of repentance, we identify areas of our life that are yet tainted with sin, prevented from serving the Lord Jesus, caught in the web of worldliness, or otherwise devoted to merely self-serving ways. All such ways of thinking and living become the object of eradication, wherever they show up in our lives. We cannot run the race of our salvation, nor do the work required by the ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us, as long as we are continuing to be entangled by sin (Heb. 12.1, 2). Sin will snare and hinder us (Prov. 1.17). Sin impedes our prayers, so that we cannot obtain the mercy and grace essential for all our times of need (Ps.

66:18; Heb. 4:16). Sin prevents the work of restoration from going forward because it continues to feed the corruption and decay that blind us to the beauty, goodness, and truth of God.

We must embrace and practice the discipline of repentance, that our conversion to Christ, and His conversion of everything in our lives to the glory of God, can continue and increase in godliness and righteousness toward the coming day of the restoration of all things.

A time of refreshing

Second, we must avail ourselves of the Lord's refreshing for every area of our lives. Think of this refreshing not so much like getting a cool drink on a hot day, but like refreshing your email.

What happens when you hit the refresh button on your email? Old messages, no longer relevant or needed, drop away, and new messages arrive, fraught with information, opportunities, and next steps.

The refreshing of the Lord is like that. It comes from His Presence in the form of grace and truth, mediated through the Scriptures, the Spirit of God, and other believers whom the Spirit moves to encourage us. It has the effect of reviving our souls, renewing hope and resolve, and strengthening us for every next step of faith. The refreshing of the Lord lifts us into His peace and joy, opens up to us prospects for service and growth, and emboldens us to live as witnesses for the Lord. The Lord's refreshing thus spills over into every aspect of our lives. When our soul is refreshed, that refreshing comes to expression in our words and deeds, making us vessels of God's grace and truth to the people around us and the world we inhabit.

We position ourselves to receive the Lord's refreshing as we repent of our sins, submit to His Word, listen for His Spirit, and determine to live for His glory in every area of our lives. The Lord's refreshing is not something merely to indulge, as though He intends His grace and truth to end with us. Rather, having indulged in it, with joy and thanksgiving, we go forth as earthen vessels to communicate the Lord's grace and truth, so that thanks and praise redound to Him wherever we go (2 Cor. 4:15). Thus, as we are refreshed in the Lord, the world we inhabit, and over which we are set as rulers in our own spheres (2 Cor. 10:13-18), begins to reflect in prospect that restored world that is to come.

We must daily give ourselves to learning and practicing these foundational disciplines. Repentance and refreshing in the Lord are indispensable to carrying out the ministry of reconciliation which has been given to us, and which consists in our daily and continuously working to restore the reconciled world to the Lord, for His Kingdom and glory.

For reflection

1. How would you counsel a new believer to practice repentance? Why should he?
2. What is your approach to receiving the daily and continuous refreshing that comes from the Presence of the Lord?
3. How do repentance and the Lord's refreshing work together to help us carry out the ministry of reconciliation?

Next Steps – Transformation: What is one thing you can do, beginning now, to bring more repentance and more of the Lord's refreshing into your life?

The Reconciled World

For Reflection or Discussion

1. How is it that Christ has reconciled the world to God, yet we have been given the ministry of reconciliation?
2. How broad is the scope of reconciliation? How much of your life does that entail?
3. What is the starting point for reconciliation, and why must we start here?
4. How is Jesus “making all things new”?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this first installment in our series, *Restoring the Reconciled World*?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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