

Reconciliation: God's Goal and Mission for His People

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Introduction

What are some of the key words we are currently using to describe our world?

- War
- Terrorism
- Disease
- Poverty
- Racism/Tribalism
- Corruption
- Sexual Perversion

All of these are part of sin which is that which is contrary to law and principles of God and thus is that which separates us from God and from one another.

As we know, there is a war raging in Ukraine. If we had the ability to have all the facts, in addition to the horrible sinful atrocities taking place now, we could trace this war back to some sin that was against God and against certain people. In addition, this world is filled with many other negative things, including crippling diseases, birth defects, natural disasters and other tragedies that may not be a direct result of sin but produce some of the same kinds of misery.

A world filled with these kinds of evils and tragedies is not the kind of world God created. In fact, the God's original world was the exact opposite of these things. We see a picture of that world in the Garden of Eden.

- ***It was a world filled with beauty.*** There was nothing to disturb the splendor and beauty and perfection of that place.
- ***It was a world filled with abundance.*** Adam and Eve had all kinds of fruit and other foods. There was no hunger or poverty or lack of anything in the original creation.
- ***It was a world filled with peace.*** There was no war or violence or terrorism or the kinds of disagreement that lead to trouble because everyone and everything there was in perfect harmony with God. Everything was submissive to God's will and everyone was happy.

Unfortunately, we know that sin entered into that world and that sin created big problems. In fact, it created at least three kinds of problems.

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It created a breach between humans and God.

The first hint of this is when Adam and Eve heard God in the Garden, they hid themselves from him (Genesis 3:8). They knew they had disobeyed and that he would be disappointed with them. This breach between God and the human race is dramatically illustrated when Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden and out of the presence of God (Genesis 3:23-24).

It created a breach in the human race.

At first, we see only a little hint of this. When God asked Adam whether he had eaten the forbidden fruit, Adam said *"The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it"* (Genesis 3:12). Here Adam justifies his actions by blaming others. This is the first step in creating interpersonal conflict. And the hardship that produced poverty and the sinful way of thinking led to the first example of violence in the world. Cain was not happy that God accepted his brother's gifts better than his own so, in a fit of anger and jealousy, he killed his brother (Genesis 4:8).

It disrupted the whole world system.

As a result of this breach with God, the earth, including its environment was spoiled. God said, *"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field."* (Genesis 3:17-18). The perfect world order God had put in place were disrupted. Many things were spoiled including food production, security, comfort, beauty, and others.

This is the kind of earth that the rest of humanity inherited from our parents—a world filled with rebellion and misunderstanding and an unstable which often leads to jealousy, conflict, violence, and misery. It was a world completely different from the beautiful world God had originally made. The new world was filled with sin and all of its negative consequences. The entry of sin into the world has produced poverty and sickness and hatred and war which has spread all over the world. All of us have experienced these kinds of negative things.

- We have all personally sinned and come short of the glory of God.
- We have all experienced sickness and injuries and broken bodies.
- We have all been victims or witnesses of crime and oppression or other injustices.

I have personally experienced many of these negative things that impact our world.

- I have had malaria 24 times.
- I have been a victim of burglary and cheating. I have been shot at and kicked in the face during an armed robbery.
- I have personally seen the consequences of violence, in scenes not unlike what you are seeing on your TV screens from Ukraine.
- I have lost my senior son to spinal meningitis.

I am now going to look at God's response to those things which relates to his goal for humanity and the responsibilities he gives to us who are his followers.

Reconciliation: God's Goal

God's Response to the Fall of Humanity

God was obviously disappointed with the decisions of Adam and Eve. No doubt he wanted to be merciful but, based upon his own system of justice, he chose to send them out of the perfect world they had enjoyed and allow the world to experience the consequences of their rebellion against God. Fortunately, God will not be defeated by any enemy. God was willing to allow the human race to suffer because of their sin but he was not prepared to allow his creation to perpetually remain in that sinful and destructive condition.

Therefore, God created a plan to stop the sin and rebellion against God and reverse the conditions that sin brought into the world. What was God's strategy to do this? It can be described in one word. This is the word **reconciliation**. Note these key verses:

*All this is from God, who **reconciled** us to himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**: that God was **reconciling** the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the **message of reconciliation**. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: **Be reconciled to God**. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)*

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him **to reconcile to himself all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But **now he has reconciled you** by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation (Colossians 1:19-22)*

What can we learn from these two passages about reconciliation?

- **We were alienated from God because of our sins.** “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior” (Colossians 1:21). We were not alienated from God by misunderstanding or confusion but sin against God.
- **God initiated the reconciliation process.** This is said at least three times in these verses. This shows God's commitment to reversing the effects of sin through reconciliation.
- **This reconciliation comes through Jesus Christ.** God has chosen Jesus as the agent of reconciliation. This is mentioned twice in these verses.
- **God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.** This is stated in 2 Corinthians 5:18 and 19. We are God's agents or ambassadors of reconciliation. This means whatever profession we have or work we do, the ultimate goal of all of it is reconciliation.
- **God desires to reconcile all things to himself.** Note the words: “...and through him to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” This of course starts with all human beings. This also includes everything that was cursed or affected by the fall.

It is the various aspect of reconciliation² that I will discuss in the rest of this presentation. Reconciliation is the task God has called us to do and therefore is the heart of missions. Everything that we are doing in missions fits under the umbrella of reconciliation.

Reconciliation: God's Mission for His People

If God is going to restore the world to what it was before, how is he going to do it? God uses two key principles when he works on this earth.³

Whenever God works on this earth, he always works through humans.

There is abundant evidence of this. God saved the world the first time through the efforts of Noah. This old man had to build that boat and collect those animals and enough food to feed them for the months they would be on the boat. Even miracles involved human effort.

- The Red Sea did not open until Moses stretched out his hand.
- The first miracle of Jesus required the servants to go get water and take it to the guests at the wedding.
- The greatest miracle of Jesus, the feeding of the 5000, required his disciples to find the resources, organize the people, distribute the food, and clean up afterwards.

God created humans to be his workers on this earth. All that God does on this earth somehow involves human effort which God multiplies and uses even though it is imperfect. Thus, if God is going to reconcile the world, he is going to use human beings to do it.

Whenever God works on this earth, he always works the hard way, the slow way, the difficult way, the progressive way, which means he starts very small, moves slowly but eventually succeeds.

We will only look at one illustration of this truth. "*The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. **I will make you into a great nation . . .**'*" (Genesis 12:1-2). There are two distinct promises in this section that relate to everything else we see in the Bible. I will only focus on the first which is: "*I will make you into a great nation.*" (Genesis 12:2a). The creation of the nation of Israel followed these two principles.

- When Abraham died there was no nation.
- At the end of Genesis 200 years later there was still no nation.
- At the end of the Pentateuch 600 years later, there was no nation.
- At the end of Joshua and Judges there was still no nation.

² There are many synonyms or words found in the Bible and theology with overlapping meanings. These include restoration, renewal, restitution, re-birth (born again), regeneration, redemption, and recovery. All of them speak of some element of restoring or replacing or rebuilding something that is no longer what it used to be. All of these are included in the word reconciliation.

³ I am indebted to Mr. James "Buck" Hatch, a lecturer at Columbia International University in 1973, for these two observations.

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It took at least 1000 years before that promise was fulfilled. However, God did indeed fulfill his promise to make a great nation out of the children of Abraham. And this process was done through the efforts of human beings, enhanced, and made successful by God himself.

The point is that God is not going to reconcile all things in the world quickly. It is going to take time. In fact, when all of this is over, we will see that the whole history of the world will be the story of God slowly reconciling the world back to himself, by blessing the efforts of his people.

Reconciliation: Specific Lessons from Jesus

If my theory that God's goal in this world is to reconcile "*all things*" back to what he originally intended them to be, this should be reflected in life and ministry of Jesus. Note this interesting exchange between Jesus and Philip:

*Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?** The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work (John 14:8-10).*

In these statements, Jesus was basically saying that when his disciple saw what he was doing and saying, they were seeing and hearing what God believes and is doing.

So, what were the goals of Jesus and how did he attempt to fulfill them? Jesus engaged in several types of reconciliation.

Reconciliation of Humanity to God

The most obvious break in the original fall was between God and the human race. Ever since that time, we humans have lived in alienation to God.

- *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.* (Isaiah 59:2). It is sin that separates us from God.
- *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23). This separation is described as and leads to death.

The most obvious goal for God is that humans be reconciled to him. That means that the most important task God calls any person to is to find ways to reconcile humanity back to God. This is what Paul says: "*All this is from God, who **reconciled** us to himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**: that God was **reconciling** the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the **message of reconciliation**"* (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

This was one of the primary missions of Jesus.

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- This was the main message of Jesus' predecessor, John the Baptist. He began his ministry by saying "*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near*" (Matthew 3:2). His practice of baptism demonstrated that people were turning from their sins to God.
- The first words given to the public we hear from the mouth of Jesus are also "*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near*" (Matthew 4:17).
- When Nicodemus, the religious leader, visited Jesus, Jesus told him, "*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again*" (John 3:3). This was a figurative way of describing restoration of a relationship with God.
- On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus spoke about reconciling with God by telling the Samaritan woman he would give her "*living water*" (John 4:10) that would spring up to become "*eternal life*" (4:14). We are told that "*because of his words (at that time) many more became believers.*" Jesus' ministry to the woman at the well was a major reconciliation event for the people in Samaria.
- When four men brought a sick man to see Jesus and lowered him down through the roof, the first thing Jesus said to him was, "*Friend, your sins are forgiven.*" (Luke 5:20). That meant he had been reconciled to God.

Though the ministry of Jesus was not as exclusively devoted to evangelism as that of John the Baptist, certainly we see in his ministry that the highest goal in life must be to be reconciled to God and to help reconcile others to God.

This is what Christian missions is all about. Jesus told his disciples shortly before departing this earth for the last time: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus said that their first priority was making disciples of Jesus which would mean that they were reconciled to God. This includes all things we associate with missions, either at home or abroad:

- Evangelism
- Church planting
- Discipleship
- Creating and maintaining the structures required by those activities

I think we understand this well. Therefore, I am not going to spend more time on this aspect of reconciliation. Missionary work is synonymous with trying to reconcile people to God. The Church exists around the world because missionaries have taken this duty seriously.

Reconciliation of Sickness to Health

There was no sickness in the Garden and God never intended for humans to suffer sickness and other physical ailments. Therefore, Jesus spent a significant amount of his time healing the sick. In fact, though this may not be a politically correct statement in a missionary conference, based upon the record that we have, Jesus spent more time healing people than doing evangelism. According to my calculations, The word "heal" is associated with Jesus 58 times. Also, Jesus is described as "touching" people" or people touching him for healing 29 times (including the touch of the coffin that raised a young man to life, Luke 7:14). By adding all of these together we see the gospel writers using "healing language" of Jesus 87 times.

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This does not suggest that healing the body is more important than reconciling people to God. What this does say is that restoring people to normal health, the way that God created humans to be, was an important goal of Jesus and he spent a lot of time doing it.

Fortunately, missionary organizations have often followed Jesus' concern about health issues in establishing hospitals and clinics and caring for the physical needs of people. In or near Jos, where I live, there are three major hospitals that were started and run by missionaries. I have personally benefited from those missionary hospitals.

Since this is another practice that missionaries have been involved in, I will not say much more about this. However, I will make one more comment. When I was a young person, I believed that there was a real dichotomy in the world that included a specific group and then a group that was better. For example, there were two kinds of people in the world, Christians, and non-Christians. There were two kinds of Christians, the full-time Christian workers, and the rest of us. There were two kinds of full-time Christian workers, the pastors and home-based staff and the missionaries who served overseas. There were two kinds of missionaries, the "real missionaries," those who did evangelism and discipleship and training pastors and the "support missionaries"—the medical people and those who did agricultural work and other non-spiritual things. It was my understanding that the only reason you would have a missionary dentist would be to win that patient to Christ. Such people were supportive to the evangelists and church planters. However, I was wrong about that. We do health ministries because it is the goal of God for all people to have healthy bodies. Jesus never demanded any kind of confessional statement out of those he healed. He even healed those nine lepers he knew would not even have proper appreciation for what he did. Jesus was concerned about the health of everyone, whether they followed him or not.

I believe this should be the attitude of all missionaries and other followers of Jesus today—we try to help with health needs simply because this is one of God's reconciliation goals.

Reconciliation of Knowledge to Truth

When humanity fell into sin, it affected every part of the universe, including knowledge. Much knowledge has been perverted or distorted in some way. Knowledge can be perverted and it is only truth that will correct it. Therefore, Jesus was interested in correcting the established knowledge of that day by the presentation of truth. Note these statements from Jesus:

- *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. (Matthew 5:21-22)*
- *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (5:27-28)*
- *"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; (5:33-34)*
- *"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. (5:38-39)*

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- *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (5:43-44).*

Seven times in his teaching, using this formula, Jesus correcting some common misunderstanding. Sometimes these were the wrong interpretation of the original law or a wrong application of the law. Sometimes these were going back to the original purpose of God and at other times, Jesus was elevating the acceptable human response to a higher standard.

The bottom line is this: Jesus spent a lot of his time correcting knowledge and explaining truth. In fact, according to my calculations, the word "teach" is associated with Jesus 62 times, not counting the 45 verses where Jesus was addressed as "Rabbi" or "Teacher." The word "preach" is associated with Jesus another 14 times. Adding these together, we see the gospel writers using "teaching language" of Jesus 76 times. That suggests that Jesus was very concerned to correct the perverted knowledge and perceptions that were in the world.

Once again, our missionary organizations have done reasonably well in following the example of Jesus, particularly in doing theological education. Within 20 miles of Jos where I live, there are at least four seminaries that were established and staffed by missionaries. I have personally done adjunct teaching at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary, West Africa Theological Seminary, Evangel Theological Seminary and done external examination for others.

Because God's truth is so important, I think that there is still a need for such missionaries who are trained to do teach theology and pastoral ministries. However, there is another application I want to make about this goal. Note Paul's intriguing words in this passage.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Here Paul talks about "*the world*" which is not so much a description of behavior or even attitudes so much as simply ***thinking and reasoning like the world does***. Paul argues God's people do not think like the world. To say this another way, there are many perversions of God's pure original truth in society.

One of the tasks of the followers of Jesus is to reconcile all knowledge back to the original truth God created. This goes beyond just theology.

- There are perversions related to sociology.
- There are perversions related to psychology.
- There are perversions related to anthropology.
- There are perversions related to geology.

God is calling people and preparing some of his followers to become academics and go into all academic disciplines. He wants his people to bring God's true perspective on all areas of life and to correct those things that have been distorted. This is a reconciliation of knowledge to truth.

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To show us how strongly Paul believed these things, he used strong military language to make his arguments.

We demolish arguments.

The word “*demolish*” is a military word. The word “*argument*” in this context is the word *logismos* which is the word from which we get logic. The world attempts to use various logical arguments to undermine God's claims. Paul said it is our duty to demolish those arguments. However, we are not going to do that without serious thought and research. That is why it is important for Christians to respond to the call of being teachers in all kinds of educational institutions, including the public universities. It is the responsibility of our Christian academics to do the necessary research and give the necessary thought until they can destroy the flesh-based logic of the unbelieving world.

We bring down high things that oppose the knowledge of God.

The word translated “pretension” in this passage meant “high things.” It apparently refers to arguments that appear to be prestigious and scholarly. They are arguments that are couched in professional and academic language that attempt to undermine the absolute truth God teaches. This is only a façade. We must destroy all such arguments. A. T. Robertson says about this passage, “Paul aims to pull down the top-most perch of audacity in their reasonings against the knowledge of God.”⁴

How are we going to do this? We are going to do this by superior research and better logic and more convincing arguments. And we are going to do all of this in the power of the Holy Spirit who has promised to guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

We bring into captivity every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

I used to think that this passage was urging me to discipline my mind, similar to what is taught in Philippians 4:8 which tells us to think on things that are true and noble and right and pure and lovely and holy and praiseworthy. However, by examining the context of this passage carefully, it is obvious that is not what it is talking about.

The word translated “*thought*” here is the word *noema* which could be translated as “thought” or an evil thought. I believe this passage is saying we Christians must not only demolish the arguments of the enemy and expose the high-sounding rhetoric but we must go on the offensive and bring every thought—every academic discipline—every truth under the authority of Jesus Christ. We must make sure every discipline is brought in line with the way Christ views it. We must discover that stamp of God that is on everything thing God created. We must reconcile all knowledge to God's truth. That is a big responsibility—the responsibility of the academic.

- The average layman cannot do this.
- The average preacher may even struggle to do this.
- The theologian cannot do this for every possible academic discipline in the world.

⁴ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, electronic version; no page

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It is going to take those academics who tackle this duty with missionary zeal to thoughtfully study and understand and explain God's perspective on every discipline God has created.

This is the ministry that God has given to me for the last 34 years. In 1986, God gave me a vision of going to the academic part of the public universities to take the gospel. Our organization was first called International Institute for Christian Studies but the name was later changed to Global Scholars.⁵ We see our task as doing all the things other campus ministries do, including evangelism, discipleship, and apologetics but we go beyond that. We try to bring the sweet fragrance of God's truth into every disciple and thus reconcile all knowledge back to God's truth.

This is an important part of God's reconciliation in this world. I pray that God will raise up academic missionaries who will fill the Christian and public universities of the world to help restore God's truth to every discipline where it has been compromised.

Reconciliation of People to People

The Model of Jesus

On one occasion the mother of the Zebedee brothers came to Jesus asking to have the positions on each side of Jesus. When the other disciples heard about this we are told that they were "*indignant with the two brothers*" (Matthew 12:24). Jesus's response was to call the disciples together and solve the problem. This is an example of Jesus reconciling his disciples because of an interpersonal problem.

In God's plan to restore his creation back to the way it was, he was not just satisfied to restore a relationship between himself and the people, he was also interested in his people restoring broken relationships with one another.

Human relationship problems are first seen when Cain quarreled and later killed his brother Abel. We then see conflict all through the Bible, sometimes within families, sometimes within communities, sometimes within nations, sometimes between nations. However, every interpersonal conflict is contrary to God's will. Every conflict is a direct result of the violation of some principle of God. Every conflict requires reconciliation. If God's goal is to reconcile people to one another, how is he going to do that? He is going to use us, his people, to do it.

Specific Strategies of Jesus

In Jesus' inaugural address to his kingdom, which is the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called sons of God*" (Matthew 5:9). What does that mean? We know what a peace maker is. A peacemaker reconciles two people who have been estranged from one another.

What is the reward of a peacemaker? Based upon this passage, the reward is to be recognized as a son of God. That is a phrase that is used of Jesus many times. That means that in some ways,

⁵ For more information about Global Scholars, see <https://global-scholars.org>. A subsidiary of this organization that is working with indigenous Christian academics all around the world in all academic disciplines is the Society of Christian Scholars. See <https://global-scholars.org/society-of-christian-scholars/>

the peacemaker will receive a similar type of honor that Jesus receives because he or she is representing Jesus the great peace maker.

Reconciling Ethnic Groups. Jesus initiated reconciliation with several different ethnic groups who did not have good relationships with the Jews. For example, he healed the Roman centurion's servant and then declared that that many will come from the east and west (non-Jews) to eat with Abraham in the kingdom (Matthew 8:5-12). So, Jesus started the process of reconciliation between Jews and non-Jews. We see other examples of this when Jesus spent time with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-26) and also responded to the request of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). Jesus made at least two trips to the Decapolis on the east side of the Sea of Galilee which was a majority Gentile area (Mark 5:1-20; 7:31). All of these incidents were designed to break down the barriers and bring reconciliation between various ethnic groups.

Reconciling to an Offended Brother. Jesus was concerned that people initiate reconciliation between themselves and alienated friends or relatives.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-34)

In the subsequent verses, Jesus urges people to do this quickly. This was a high priority.

Reconciling to Enemies. Jesus goes even further than in his teachings on reconciliations. Note these statements about reconciliation:

*But to you who are listening I say: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,**²⁸ **bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. . . But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them** without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:27-36).*

Why would Jesus make such extreme statements—statements that seem to contradict the system of justice which God created in the Old Testament as well as our common instincts? It only makes sense when someone robs you, the robber should be punished. But Jesus says we are not to do anything personally to punish him.

It is interesting that Jesus did not just teach these truths. These things are consistent with the way he lived. We know how Jesus responded to the people who arrested him and those who convinced Pilate to crucify him. Peter wrote: "*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly*" (1 Peter 2:23).

Why did Jesus teach and practice such extreme—such unnatural things? The reason is that he was more interested in reconciling even his enemies to him than seeing justice done in society.⁶ Therefore, he instructed his followers to treat enemies kindly. They were to do nice things even for those doing wicked things to them.

Why was it important to be so kind? Because Jesus knew that people are attracted by kindness and compassion and generosity and blessing. This draws people whereas abusing and cursing and punishing people, even if they are guilty, will drive them further from us and from God.

Here is the truth. All robbers and corrupt people and those who do violence are children of God—alienated children of God. Their very violent activities demonstrate just how far they are from God. However, God loves those alienated people. He is broken-hearted over the criminal activities which separates them from him and their friends and family and the society as a whole. He wants to see them reconciled to him. How are these people going to be reconciled to God? It is going to happen through human beings. And it is most likely going to happen through those people who are already reconciled to God. Therefore, Jesus is saying something like this: “Treat my wayward children gently. Be kind to them. Do nice things for them. Maybe your kindness will be what it takes to remind them of the Lord’s goodness and reconcile them to God.”

Once, David’s son Absalom attempted a coup against David and his kingdom. All of David’s soldiers immediately created a plan to crush that rebellion. They were government soldiers who were given the responsibility of protecting the security and integrity of the nation. Thus, they saw this coup attempt from purely a government point of view. As the king, David understood and appreciated their convictions and their strategies. After all, he was the king. However, this is how the event is recorded: David commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, *“Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.”* (2 Samuel 18:5).

From a government’s point of view, Absalom deserved death. The soldiers, representing the government, eventually ignored David’s emotions and did what the government should have done. However, from David’s point of view, this man was his estranged son, a part of his family. Regardless of what he had done, David was hoping for reconciliation and mercy for his son.

This is the way that I interpret these passages related to Jesus’ teachings about enemies, particularly violent enemies. Yes, these are criminals and from a government point of view, they deserve judgment. And the follower of Jesus does not have to interfere when the government fulfills its role. However, these terrorists and thieves are children of God and he loves them and wants them to be reconciled to him. Therefore, God’s children who have already responded to him and been reconciled to God—they should treat these criminals gently and hopefully that gentleness will bring these people to their senses and they will be reconciled to God.

⁶ In an earlier presentation, I pointed out that issues related to justice, such as the conviction and punishment of criminals, was the duty of government (Romans 13:1-7) not the citizens of Jesus’ kingdom. Jesus did not encourage government or its agents to forfeit its right to punish evil doers. However, as citizens of his very different kingdom, his followers should focus on forgiveness and gentleness and goodness that lead to reconciliation with God. See “Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Poverty in Nigeria: Pathways to Overcoming Terrorism and Banditry,” presented to the Integral Mission Consultation at the Carter Conlon Conference Center, Jos, Nigeria on 27 April 2021 by Prof. Danny McCain, Director, Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, University of Jos

How does this apply to missions? We must make a deliberate effort to expand our ministry beyond just reconciliation to God. This starts by establishing positive relationships with people who are outside of the faith. That is step one in missions.

I live in an area where there is about an equal population of Muslims and Christians. Unfortunately, things often boil over into conflicts between Christians and Muslims. I have worked hard to establish relationships with Muslims in my area several ways:

- Built relationships with my Muslim colleagues in the religious studies department.
- Spoken at a sharia conference, giving the Christian keynote address on Sharia.
- Presented a paper at a Muslim conference entitled “Christian Religious Extremism, Radicalization and Militancy in Northern Nigeria.”
- Brought Muslims and Christians together to try to reduce tension and create better understanding
- Organized workshops and other presentations trying to get Christians to respond to violence in a Christian manner and reach out to Muslims.

It is hard for Muslims to convert to Christianity because they view Christians as being drunkards, immoral, immodest, and violent. Thus, if their perception of Christianity does not change, it is highly unlikely they will every come to Christ. As for as I know, I have seen only one Muslim come to the Christian faith through my ministry. However, I have concluded that my interactions with Muslims is what I call “image evangelism.” I am trying to change the perception of Muslims about the Christian faith with my friendship and good deeds. No Muslim will likely be reconciled to our God if he or she is not attracted to those who claim to be followers of Jesus.

This is not always easy. Sometimes our fellow believers don't like it. The only time I have ever been booed was in a Christian seminary when I urged people to love and reach out to Muslims.

When we are reconciling ourselves to others, we are restoring God's kingdom on this earth.

Reconciliation of Creation to Wholeness

Jesus' most popular miracle was the feeding of the 5,000. We say it is the most popular because it is the only miracle, apart from the resurrection, found in all four gospels. That story contains one incidental detail that illustrates another area of reconciliation we see Jesus engaging it. Here is Matthew's description of the aftermath of the miracle. *“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over”* (Matthew 14:20). Interestingly, all four of the gospels mention this fact and picking up the remainder of the food is also specially mentioned in the feeding of the 4000 also.

What is the point? Jesus was concerned about the environment. Jesus did not want the place to look littered after they had ministered there. Jesus did not want the resources that had been supplied to be wasted. This simple act illustrates the principles of conservation of resources and the restoration of original beauty in the environment. This demonstrates that God is concerned about environmental restoration. God created our world to be a beautiful, safe, and productive place that would be preserved and passed from one generation to the next successfully.

Reconciliation: God's Goal and Mission for His People

One of the first two responsibilities God gave to humanity was to take care of the earth.

- “Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28)
- “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15).

A specific example of caring for the natural part of the earth is reflected in the Mosaic Law, specifically where God gives guidelines about warfare:

*When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, **do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them**, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees people, that you should besiege them? However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build siege works until the city at war with you falls (Deuteronomy 20:19-20).*

This scripture suggests that even in warfare, when some of the rules of society are lifted, soldiers must still remember their stewardship of the earth and protect it.

I think you would agree with me that we human beings have not taken good care of God's earth. God is not willing to compromise on the integrity of his earth any more than he is going to compromise on reconciliation to God on health or truth or anything else. God is calling some people to accept the responsibility to help heal his world. This, too, is part of missions work because it is helping reconcile the physical earth back to its original beauty and functionality.

Conclusion

Luke contains only two of the kingdom parables. The first is about a mustard seed. Though it is the smallest of the seeds, it will grow slowly and get so big that the birds will come and sit in its branches (Luke 13:18-19). This obviously illustrates the slow growth nature of the kingdom.

Immediately after that, Jesus tells the story about a woman who put a little bit of yeast in a large lump of dough. Eventually the yeast worked its way throughout the dough until every part of it had been affected by the yeast. The message is similar to the first parable but I believe Jesus is intending to teach something else here. He is demonstrating the powerful influence of his kingdom and the citizens of that kingdom. He is suggesting that God's people should mainstream the Christian faith—they are to penetrate every part of the world and through their excellence and expertise and integrity and knowledge and goodness and kindness, they should touch and influence every part of the society and as they do that, they will slowly reconcile all parts of God's world back to God and build his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

*“All this is from God, who **reconciled** us to himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation** . . . **Be reconciled to God**” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).*