

2012

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[BIBLICAL RECONCILIATION AS 'GOD'S ONE-ITEM AGENDA': BROAD REFLECTIONS ON THE DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE]

Response to Biblical Reconciliation as 'God's One-Item Agenda': Broad Reflections on the Doctrine and Practice by Dr. Curtiss Paul De Young

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June 25, 2012

In Dr. DeYoung's title of his paper I am struck by the word practice. We are all eager to talk about reconciliation but it is the practice that gives us the difficulty. II Corinthians 5:19 tells us "he has committed to us the message of reconciliation". The question for us is; are we committed to the message and practice of reconciliation?

The scriptures teach that reconciliation comes through Christ. He reconciles us to God and to others. Ephesians 2:16 clarifies that people who have been reconciled with God form one body in Christ "that has put to death their hostility". Maturity in Christ requires this reconciliation to others as we die to the hostility we formerly carried. Dr. De Young makes an excellent point when he says: "Reconciliation is a spiritual discipline- a Godly habit." I would suggest that part of spiritual maturity is evidence of this "Godly habit" of reconciliation in the life of the believer.

Dr. DeYoung speaks of ten theses by Katongole and Rice. In the second they say reconciliation is a journey. This suggests that this is a lifelong "Godly habit" that grows and develops as God's peace and grace transforms our lives to the image of Christ. It must be a practice in our life. James 1:22 reminds us: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." We must live lives that bear the fruit of reconciliation. Learning to love more, extend grace and accept one another just as Christ has accepted us (Ro. 15:7). Our lives must be in a state of conversion that produces the fruit of reconciliation as the ninth thesis declares.

This reconciliation extends in many directions. Part of our mission as believers is to pass on the mercy and comfort we have received from the Lord. II Corinthians 1:3-4 says: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our

troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” We live in a world of broken people who have suffered from injustice, sorrow, and even their own poor decisions. We have the honor of loving them and calling them to God’s kingdom of hope and reconciliation.

In practice we need to exam our hearts to see if we are true citizens of the Kingdom of God or if we are letting our earthly culture form us. Are we becoming more like Christ proclaiming his glorious message of reconciliation? Does our practice verify our words?

- Are we reconciled to the illegal alien or does our culture separate us from them and hinder us from extending love?
- Do we love those who do not share our political views; does our reconciliation extend to them?
- In issues of morality will we label people or extend hope and reconciliation?
- In racial issues will we separate ourselves or will we take time to know one another and be reconciled in our gracious Lord?
- In our churches are we willing to have difficult conversations and live in forgiveness and reconciliation or will we just leave and find another church to attend?
- Will we die to self and our personal preferences or will our love of others welcome new ideas and methods in our churches and lives?
- Will we care for the orphans, widows, prisoners, homeless, poor, or the mentally challenged?
Are we willing to live in reconciliation with them?

Micah 6:8 says: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”. That is the life of reconciliation in action and we aren’t living in reconciliation until the action takes place.