

In verse 18 we learn that God reconciled us. (clearly us believers, since He gave us the ministry of reconciliation) to Himself through Christ.

In verse 19 we learn that God reconciled the world (without qualification) to Himself through Christ. This appears to include all human beings.

In verse 20 we learn that the ministry of reconciliation includes the message: "We implore you (nonbelievers) to be reconciled to God through Christ."

Now if God has reconciled nonbelievers to Himself through Christ, why the message: "We implore you to be reconciled to God through Christ"? Are nonbelievers reconciled to God or not?

The answers seems to be that in one sense they are, and in another sense they are not but need to be. How can this tension be resolved?

The heart of the proposal made here is that Christ's atonement made possible the reconciliation of the world (all sinful human beings) to God (that is, Christ's atonement has universal value because of the infinite dignity of His person); and that Christ's atonement made potential the reconciliation of elect human beings, which potential reconciliation is actualized when they return to God in repentance and saving faith.

The use of these terms (possible, potential, actualized) necessitates a brief excursus regarding the concepts of possibility, potentiality, and actuality.

(1) Possibility brings an object or event out of the realm of non-existence into the realm of contingent existence.

To say that something is possible is to say that it is capable of being an object of thought (In the subjective realm), or that it is both capable of being an object of thought and capable of meeting the necessary conditions of existence (In the objective realm).

In the realm of subjective reality, a thing or an event is possible if it can be an object of thought. It can be an object of thought if it does not violate the laws of thought (which include the law of contradiction -- a thing cannot be both P and not-P; the law of excluded middle -- a thing must be either P or not-P; and the law of identity -- if a thing is P, then it is P).

In the realm of objective reality, a thing or an event is possible if it can be an object of thought, and if it can meet the necessary conditions of objective existence. A thing can meet the necessary conditions of objective existence if it has substance (either physical or some other kind) and location, and if it is distinct from any evaluating mind. An event can meet the necessary conditions of objective existence if it is causally related to its