

Reconciliation
2 Corinthians 5:20
Part Three

There are many well-meaning Christian leaders who, when viewing the immorality that exists around them in this world, have come to the conclusion that the church needs to do more to confront that immorality. In fact, these leaders envision that if the church of Christ can be mobilized and motivated to expend their time, energy and resources to address that immorality through pressure groups, through protests, and through the ballot box, they can bring about dramatic change.

We do not believe this. We do not believe that this kind of effort can bring about any kind of dramatic change. These efforts might bring about a few cosmetic changes but those changes will only be at best superficial and temporary.

This is what this church believes based on the biblical fact that immorality will continue to thrive, as long people remain alienated and estranged from God, for as long as they remain alienated and estranged from God they will neither have the inclination nor the capacity to live righteous lifestyles.

Therefore if we as a church truly want to impact this world in a positive way on every level we must focus our time, energy and resources not on changing the conduct of this world, not on cleaning up the fish pond but rather on fishing fish, or in other words helping people to understand how they might be reconciled to God and not only helping them to understand how they might be reconciled to God but even appealing to them, not dispassionately but passionately to be reconciled to God not based on what they might do but rather based on what God has done.

And this thought now brings us back to our current study in the epistle of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**. So now let me read these verses for you and see if this is not so.

“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, (19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting

their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (20) Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” Clearly reconciliation is the focal point of Paul’s comments in these verses, or in other words the changing of a person’s relationship with God from being an enemy, alienated and estranged, to a friend, and not just a friend but even one of His children, not destined to be condemned, but destined to be transformed into the very image of Christ and to enjoy fellowship with Him forever. So, what is the focal point of **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**? The focal point is reconciliation!

And in light of this fact, that reconciliation is the focal point of Paul’s comments in **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**, the question that we have been seeking to answer is this: What do we learn about reconciliation from 2 Corinthians 5:18-20?

So, what was the first thing we learned? The first thing that we learned was this: The ministry of reconciliation proceeds from and returns to God (2 Corinthians 5:18). We saw this truth highlighted for us in **2 Corinthians 5:18**, and what did this verse say? It said this, “**Now all these things** [our re-creation and all the things associated with our re-creation] **are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.**”

Clearly, based on what we have just read if anyone is ever going to be reconciled to God it is not going to be because of his or her hard work or religious activity but rather it will be because God reconciled them to Himself through Christ.

And how will God do this? How will God reconcile various individuals to Himself? **2 Corinthians 5:18** is clear. He will do it through Christ, whom He sent into this world, as His spotless perfect lamb, to atone for our sins, taking the punishment that we rightfully deserved upon Himself, so that He through His death might satisfy the righteous demands of God’s Law against us. Therefore in light of what God has done for us through Christ, all that is left for us to do is to exercise faith in Christ. Or in other words, all that is left for us to do is to transfer our trust from ourselves and our good works to Jesus Christ alone for our salvation so that we at that moment in time, through the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit, might be joined to Christ and

to His death so that the righteous demands of the law against us might be satisfied in Christ resulting in what? Resulting in our reconciliation to God by God through Christ.

So, what was the first thing that we learned about reconciliation from **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**? The first thing that we learned was this: That reconciliation is to God and by God, or in other words our reconciliation to God has absolutely nothing to do with us but rather it has everything to do with God and what He has done for us through Christ. So this was the first thing we learned.

So, what is the second thing we learned about reconciliation from **2 Corinthians 5:19**? The second thing we learn was this: The word of reconciliation needs to be extended to everyone in this world without making any distinctions (2 Corinthians 5:19). So now let me read you **2 Corinthians 5:19**, which I believe supports this point. And what does it say? It says this, **“Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”**

Paul in this verse shared with us basically the same thing that he shared in **2 Corinthians 5:18**, that reconciliation is to God and by God through Christ, however when Paul restated this thought in **verse 19** he changed a few words.

And one of those word changes as we noted last week could be potentially confusing if we are not careful. So, what was this word change? In **verse 18** Paul had said that God **“had reconciled us Himself through Christ.”** But in **verse 19** Paul said, **“that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”**

Now some people might quickly conclude that when Paul said that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself that he meant that God was in Christ reconciling everybody in the world to Himself excluding no one, but as we as noted last week this is not possible. For if everyone in the world were reconciled to God “in” or “through” Christ then everyone in the world would be saved. But this is absolutely not what the Scriptures teach, is it?

The Scriptures teach us that there is a heaven and there is a hell and there will be people in both. Since this is what the Scriptures teach then how should we understand Paul's use of the word "**world**" in **2 Corinthians 5:19**?

When Paul referred to "the world" in 2 Corinthians 5:19, we must understand his reference to "the world" as a reference to the world as mankind in **general** and not to all of mankind in its totality. Or in other words, the word "world" refers to the sphere in which reconciliation takes place. It refers to classes of human beings with whom God seeks reconciliation, which of course would include people from every national, racial, social, economic and ethnic group without any distinctions.

Therefore when we, the reconciled, go into the world as "ministers of reconciliation" with the "word of reconciliation," we must go to all classes of people. This message of reconciliation is not just to be proclaimed to one group, or several groups, but to every group of people that comprise this world without making any distinctions.

So, what have we learned so far from **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**? First of all, we have learned that reconciliation is to God, by God and through Christ. And secondly, we have learned that the word of reconciliation needs to be extended to everyone in this world without making any distinctions.

But there is still another thing we can learn from **2 Corinthians 5:18-20** about reconciliation. The ministers of reconciliation who are proclaiming the word of reconciliation need to proclaim this message **passionately** (2 Corinthians 5:20). So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 5:20** and see if this is not so. "**Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**" So what do you think? Based on this verse should those who have been reconciled to God by God through Christ and who have been given the ministry of reconciliation deliver the word of reconciliation dispassionately or passionately? And what is the answer? The answer of course should be passionately!

How could that not be our answer! If we believe that people, apart from faith in Christ are presently alienated and estranged from God and will ultimately

at the final judgment suffer condemnation and be cast into hell, how could we share the message of reconciliation in any other way than passionately.

So not only do we learn from **2 Corinthians 5:18-20** that reconciliation is to God, by God, and through Christ, and also that the word of reconciliation needs to be extended to everyone in this world without making distinctions, but we also learn that this message of reconciliation needs to be proclaimed passionately.

So now let us take a closer look at this verse and see if this is not so. So how does it begin? It begins with these words, **“Therefore** [in light of the fact that we, having been reconciled, have been given the ministry of reconciliation, which we saw in verse 18 and the word of reconciliation as we saw in verse 19], **we are ambassadors for Christ.**” Paul in this verse is telling his readers, based on what he has just shared, that he and those like him are ambassadors for Christ.

So how could Paul say this about himself and those like him based on what he had just shared? Let us begin to answer this question by considering the word “ambassador.”

What is an ambassador? Webster’s Dictionary defines an ambassador as an agent of highest rank assigned to a foreign government, or sovereign, as a resident representative of his or her own government, or sovereign. So based on this definition, was Paul justified in calling himself and those like him **“ambassadors for Christ”** in light of what he had just shared in **2 Corinthians 5:18-19**? Absolutely!

They, having been reconciled to God, were certainly of high rank, since they, having been reconciled, were now His friends and not just friends but also even His sons. And they, as His friends and as His sons, had been given the **“ministry of reconciliation”** and sent by Christ into this world as His resident representatives to boldly proclaimed **“the word of reconciliation.”**

So clearly Paul was justified in calling himself and those like him **“ambassadors for Christ,”** for that is exactly what they were.

And as the ambassadors of Christ it would have been their duty, as with any other ambassador, to faithfully and accurately proclaim the message that had

been entrusted them. And if they as Christ's ambassadors in fact did this, which I believe that they did, then they, as well as those who received the proclamation, should not have viewed that proclamation as coming from them but rather as from Christ Himself, or in other words as from God Himself since there is no difference in essence between Christ and God in light of the fact that Christ is the Second Person of the eternal godhead.

And it is this very point that we will see that Paul will now emphasize as we continue to read **2 Corinthians 5:20**. So, what did Paul say to the Corinthians after he had said, **“Therefore, we are ambassadors of Christ?”** He then went on to say, **“as though God were making an appeal through us.”**

Why was Paul able to say this? He able to say this because he truly believed that he and those with him, as the ambassadors of Christ, had faithfully and accurately proclaimed the message that they had been given by Christ. Or in other words, Paul believed that when ambassadors of Christ faithfully and accurately communicate the message of reconciliation, that communication should be viewed by all parties as having been spoken by God Himself.

When we as an ambassador of Christ deliver the message of reconciliation to those in need of reconciliation faithfully and accurately, then we need to understand that at the moment in time that God is in fact in a very real sense making an appeal through us to those who need to be reconciled.

So, what is the big deal about this? The big deal is this: To reject a message from us is no biggie for we have no clout, we have no power, but to reject God's message, as He personally makes an appeal **“through us”** to those whom He is seeking to reconcile, is a big deal in light of the fact that He, rooted in His Holiness, based in His justice, will in fact judge them and will cast them into hell if they do not take advantage of what He is offering them in Christ through us, His ambassadors.

So in light of this thought it is not at all surprising what Paul said next in **2 Corinthians 5:20**. So let us now continue to read the verse one more time but this time we will complete it. **“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”**

So who is Paul, as an ambassador of Christ, begging to be reconciled to God in **2 Corinthians 5:20**? Some might be thinking that Paul is begging the Corinthian Church to be reconciled since this epistle is in fact written to them. But in light of the fact that for the most part those in the Corinthian church had already been reconciled and that within the flow of the text Paul had just spoken about how God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself not in its totality but in a very general sense, I believe we would have to conclude that Paul is not begging the Corinthian church per se to be reconciled to Him, but rather he is begging any of those who had attached themselves to the church who were still alienated and estranged from God to be reconciled to Him. And why was so willing to beg them?

Paul was begging those who were still alienated from God to receive His offer of reconciliation, for he knew that if they rejected His offer they would be ultimately condemned. And we also, like Paul, must keep this realization at the forefront of our minds.

What we are doing as Christ ambassadors is a life and death matter and we must approach it accordingly, or in other words passionately! We must desire that people be reconciled to God more than we desire anything else in this world, and this will hopefully be reflected not only in everything we choose to do but even in terms of what we say, which was the case here when Paul on the behalf of Christ personally begged certain individuals to be reconciled to God.

I know that there are certain Christian leaders who believe that the church needs to be much more engaged when it comes to confronting the immorality of this world. But I believe their well-intended exhortations are misplaced, for until individual people are reconciled to God they will have neither the inclination nor the capacity to change their behavior.

So how are we reconciled to God? We are reconciled to God when we place our faith in Christ; or in other words, we are reconciled to God when we, having exercised faith in Christ, are placed into Christ through the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. When we are baptized into Christ we are therefore baptized into His death, meaning that when Christ died on our behalf and as our substitute we died in Him. Or in other words, He died our death thus satisfying God's righteous demands against us thus resulting in

reconciliation, or in other words when we go from being an enemy of God to a friend, and not just a friend but a son and a joint-heir with Christ.

People will not be dramatically changed by focusing on their behavior, but will be dramatically changed if they are reconciled to God.

May God give us the grace to be passionate about the ministry and the message of reconciliation that we as the ambassadors of Christ have been given.